writing spaces

readings on writing
volume 4

edited by Dana Lynn Driscoll, Megan Heise,
Mary K. Stewart, and Matthew Vetter

Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing 4

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Contents

1 Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing

Sara P. Alvarez, Amy J. Wan, and Eunjeong Lee

Overview

The steady increase of movements of people around the world has transformed the face, potential, and expectations of the US writing classroom.* These intersecting shifts have also contributed to critical discussions about how writing educators should integrate students' linguistic diversity and ways of knowing into literacy instruction. This chapter's central premise is to share with students how the work that they already do with languages has great value. Specifically, the chapter introduces terms, concepts, and strategies to support students in identifying how their own multilingual workin' of languages contribute to the making of academic writing. Our goal is to support students in recognizing the value of their own language practices and to provide strategies that students can use to rethink their own relationships with writing. Orienting practices around translingualism and envisioning students' language work as that of "language architects" creates opportunities to uplift, value, and sustain students' rich language practices, as well as ways to critically understand their academic writing experiences.

When you think about writing for school, you're probably imagining composing "formal/academic writing" where you are trying to make yourself sound like an expert, putting on an objective "academic" tone that can often feel far removed from your own voice. You might have the experience of "cleaning up" your voice to make yourself sound "appropriate," aware that people who read your writing

might make assumptions about how much you know based on what words you use. Because you often move in and out of different languages (beyond English) or lingos—how you communicate with your best friend vs. how you communicate with your coworker at the local electronics store, for instance—you might be trying to filter out variations of your voice for those different ways of communicating. Doing this work, essentially trying to silence your voice, can be exhausting. And honestly, this reduction of your voice can make writing feel difficult, irrelevant, and monotone (aka boring).

The three of us, too, have wrestled with questions like, "How do I bring my own voice into academic writing," and "How does who I am matter in my writing?" Over the years, we have developed a number of writing strategies and approaches that help us shift away from our own self-doubts and writing hurdles. What if you didn't have to turn off who you are when you're writing? What if we shared with you that the different ways you use languages in your everyday life can fortify your writing as you design your academic voice? As we show in this essay, we have gained critical practices to embrace all of our languages as part of who we are, shifting our writing from what's "appropriate" or "standard" to thinking of our language vision, playfulness, and voice as part of what it means to be a *language architect*.

Architects, as Professor of Education Dr. Nelson Flores describes, make critical design choices to capture their own unique vision. Dr. Flores explains that as designers of meaning, language architects carefully consider how to work with their own languages and voice for the most successful communication in a specific situation (25). In other words, how you speak, act, and negotiate language in uneven power contexts is your working as a language architect. As Dr. Gwendolyn Pough, Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Dean's Professor of the Humanities, argues about our language and writing, "we all *do* language. That is our greatest strength" (303). Following Dr. Flores's and Dr. Pough's arguments, we pose that in how we "*do*" language as language architects, we labor, exercise, and push ideas and boundaries about writing. This is what we mean by *workin'* languages.

This chapter shares how we, as writers and scholars, and what Dr. Ofelia García, Professor Emerita of Urban and Bilingual Education, calls emergent and experienced bilinguals, work as language architects, and resist those critical feelings that push us to suppress our own voices. We take a research-based stance on how power dynamics and assumptions about language and "good writing" often reinforce the idea of a singular standard and English language form. As we have shown in our scholarly work, such

writing "standards" often reflect historical and existent prejudices and inequities in our society that racialize writers and their divergent lived experiences (Alvarez and Wan; Lee and Alvarez). If you're reading this essay for your writing class, your instructor likely understands this. Therefore, this chapter is also an invitation for you, our reader, to conscientiously inquire into the richness of your own voice in writing, and to critically uptake the work it takes to fully capture this potential in your own writing practice. Your disposition and attitude towards writing, as well as continuous writing practice, are part of the *workin'* required to move within and against so-called writing standards.

We begin with a brief discussion of why who you are matters in your writing by introducing how writing scholars have recently discussed the way people *do language* on a daily basis, specifically about how our ideas about language shape—and at times restrict—how we write in schooling contexts. Then, we share a few strategies that can help you to more actively bring all of your language practices and related experiences in your writing.

Why Who You Are Matters in Your Writing

We want to start by recognizing that embracing who we are in our writing is a journey. It takes time for each of us to feel confident that "I matter in my writing" and comfortable with seeing ourselves as language architects. In our K-to-Ph.D. schooling experiences, the three of us have identified a number of situations that taught us to believe that the full extent of our voices did not belong, matter, or "fit" in "academic or formal" writing settings; even now, we occasionally find ourselves experimenting with new ways of bringing our full selves into our writing. In this manner, we must acknowledge that while schooling spaces may mean well, they often engage ineffective and harmful writing approaches that view the richness of our language(s) as problems to "fix" (Kinloch).

For example, as an international student of color who used to speak English as a non-dominant language, Eunjeong felt pressured to make herself sound less of who she is—a multilingual, transnational, and immigrant-generation scholar with ample experiences with how to work languages. Eunjeong often focused on following the "rules" of writing, mainly "finding" lexical and syntactical "errors," commas, and article usage. She often sought to be read as "objective" and "neutral." Subtracting her voice from her own writing was not difficult for Eunjeong given the prevalent focus on English proficiency and stigma surrounding international and immigrant-generation students like her. To Eunjeong, this stigma and

standard assumption about how to assess "good" writing is like the air we breathe; it's always there, and no one needs to point that out to you.

We believe it's not just Eunjeong who *does language* in this way. Our various experiences of learning what writing is, and how we should practice it, unfortunately, have often enforced a *deficit perspective*. When it comes to writing, ideas about what is "appropriate" are often at the heart of judgments about whether writing, and by extension the author, is "good." These judgments also often connect to what social scientists identify as a process of racialization, by which specific and codified racial meanings are applied to communities of people, their languages and cultural practices. Thus, judgments on "good" writing extend inequities and negative racial codings in our society while suppressing our linguistic and cultural pluralism. More so, these beliefs about good "academic" writing often reinforce so-called *standard written English*, a way of falsely understanding writing in an English language as objective and monolithic.

Yes, you read this correctly: *standard written English* is not an objective set of criteria. Instead, it is an ideal that centers a "norm" often conceived as white, upper-middle class, "accentless," and male, built from a myth that our society needs only one language (without any form of variation) for unity ("Talk American"). Of course, such a belief does not capture our multilingual reality. Many of you, who communicate within families, school, work settings, and online spaces in different languages, likely already know this and have gained great expertise on workin' languages, even though school and other authoritative bodies might make it seem otherwise. And yet, the idea of standard English powerfully maintains our unequal realities, erasing and/or exoticizing our highly multilingual world. Dr. Flores (mentioned earlier) and Dr. Jonathan Rosa, Professor of Linguistic Anthropology, have crucially pointed out how the idea of standardized English (both written and spoken) as the "appropriate" language relies on the racialization of students, regardless of their actual language use (157-158). For instance, while Princess Charlotte of Cambridge, UK, is praised for engaging her Spanish and English bilingualism, multilingual students, who are viewed through a racializing lens, are often told that their bilingual practice is inadequate in academic spaces.

The narrow understandings of what is "appropriate" and/for academic writing are *ideological*, that is, based on a dominant system of ideas, so deeply rooted that they seem intangible and unquestionable— "like the air we breathe" as Eunjeong mentions above. And while a writing class alone can't change existing inequalities and prejudices, it must work to highlight how these values have been constructed, so all of us writers can conscien-

tiously challenge how what is considered "good" and "clear" writing greatly depends on this dominant system of values.

Our workin' of language(s) then reckons with the damage brought on by *monolingual ideology*. As Dr. April Baker-Bell, Associate Professor of Language, Literacy, and English Education, rightly argues in her book on *Linguistic Justice*, the judgment of Black Englishes in all their rich variant forms as "lesser than" so-called standard English constitutes *linguistic racism* (16). In this manner, our way of workin' languages—both what we see as crucial language in our writing and how we do language as language architects—looks toward linguistic and racial justice. What we mean by this is that your voice and all the ways you use it—as part of who you are—makes all the difference, and therefore, should be amplified and cultivated.

Our strong belief that who we are and how we critically use language matters in our writing is sustained by an understanding of language identified as *translingualism*. An approach that resists monolingual ideology, translingualism views our different and varied language practices as critical in inquiring, supporting, and sustaining the full range of richness in our voices (Horner and Alvarez). Adopting *translingual-oriented* practices and attitudes means we, as language architects, work to sustain cultural and linguistic pluralism, based on language research and against linguistic injustice. While translingualism as pedagogy should be taken up collectively—by schools and committed educators who are judging and assessing your writing—many of your writing practices can also reflect this *translingual orientation*.

Any time you are about to start a "new" writing assignment, you are already equipped with ample ways of voicing and translating, with tools and ways of knowing. Tuning into the abundance of your voice, identifying its many variations and how these plural ways of voicing work with and for different types of audiences, is a way to continue building on your experiences, your *linguistic resources*, as language architects. The more you practice your different ways of communicating, the stronger and broader these resources become. Being aware of the richness of your linguistic resources when you write, as well as conscientiously engaging these resources can guide you in becoming a more effective writer, and, more importantly, one that feels more genuine to yourself.

Tuning into Your Strengths: Strategies and Approaches

In this section, we offer specific ways of using our rich language practices to understand how they might contribute to our academic writing. These writing strategies and practices are oriented by *translingualism*, as they have been designed to support you in engaging your own linguistic experiences, positionalities, and practices at different moments of composing in a range of writing situations (e.g., traditional alphabetic-based text, multimodal, public writing).

In offering these strategies, we start with a premise: as people who do language on a daily basis in different and plural ways, we/you, writers must work to gain confidence and a sense of pride in our own diverse multilingual practices (Lee and Alvarez). We contextualize this premise in the everyday realities of our world, where *linguistic racism* and *linguistic injustice* continue to impact our communities differently. This means that many of us whose languages are racialized in various ways may have to work their academic writing contexts more so, or differently.

Cultivating Your Words

A frequently encountered struggle we face as writers is when the "right" words don't come to us easily. For instance, as a college senior and a high school English Language Arts (ELA) student-teacher, Sara recalls the experience with a writing assignment for her Secondary Education course and facing a blank MS Word screen for what felt like a number of hours. Sara remembers thinking, "¿Como empezar? The right words aren't coming to me. I don't know what is more frustrating, that I know I have a paper due and I can't get it started, or that I'm actually dedicating this time to my frustration?"

The struggle with finding the "right" words has a lot to do with how we have been taught to censor our voices, how we extend *monolingual ideology* on ourselves. But one way to counter this struggle is by proceeding to write (sketch, outline, list, draw) whatever words and ideas come to us as we think about the task at hand. Engaging a writing assignment in this form allows us to mess with the writing process, and to open up opportunities for ourselves to hear the many variations of our languages. Once we have some words, ideas, frustrations on paper, we give ourselves small writing tasks, like "just write whatever you can or feel about X topic for 5 minutes." We might go back to a passage in a related reading and write about our response. We might record ourselves talking and then write down what

we find useful. The writing will sound the closest to how we sound in our heads with multiple languages and ways of speaking—the very same way it did for Sara in her mind. This strategy moves us toward the critical and creative aspects that can feel liberating and purposeful about writing, moving us beyond the restrictive forces brought on by *monolingual ideology*. Instead of treating writing as a technical skill that we either have or not, we, as language architects, design ways to sustain the embodied richness of our voices.

Cultivating our words as language architects compels us to then go back to what we wrote and revise, choosing and shaping what we hope for that specific writing situation—a particular moment, task or assignment. We revisit our writing—as a way to rethink, rewrite, and reconfigure our ideas, but also to better understand ourselves as thinkers. Examining how we shape our writing classifies as *editing*, one of the critically dynamic aspects of writing *revision*. Once we work our languages this way, we can shift our attention to lower-priority concerns in writing, such as *proofreading*. *Proofreading* refers to those revision practices that focus on checking for lexical norms and other technicalities, such as style manuals, use of commas, and capitalization. In this cyclical and higher-lower priority-oriented process, we are abandoning approaches to writing revision that either look to "weed out" the difference in our language, or simply accept such difference without critically engaging with it. So, yes, even concerns deemed as lower priority deserve some critical inquiry. For instance, throughout the years, Sara has learned to pay closer attention to how individuals idiosyncratically use commas as a way to express emphasis and tonality in their writing.

Sizing up the Situation

Sizing up the situation means tuning into what other people are saying and how they're saying it. It means surveying and observing the situation as you consider how you will step in. For instance, Amy's language choices are still informed by a childhood moment when she felt that she could not fully join her family's mixed English and Cantonese conversation. We think about these moments of trying to understand what's expected when we're thinking about how to best approach a writing situation.

To start writing this chapter, for example, one of the first things we did was read previous contributions to *Writing Spaces* to get a sense of the expected tone and the structure. In reading what fellow writers had done, we wanted to get a feel for what these sounded like and what "moves" the authors made in each piece. Several started with an anecdote, talked directly

to readers, and explained a number of scholarly concepts in a straightforward way so that student writers could gain new or further familiarity with these terms. We also noticed that there were always specific suggestions, demonstrations, and examples. Part of doing this examination was also imaginative—how could we contribute to an ongoing conversation and push it forward? How different were the chapters from one another and which could we imagine our chapter being like? But part of this was practical—how many citations were included in each chapter? How did writers move from one idea to another? How many sections did writers use and what was the structure like? We read like writers, as Mike Bunn explained in an earlier volume of *Writing Spaces* (71-86).

We started writing by *mimicking* these moves, strategizing what we were seeing in other writings and taking on a similar tone and structure. Sometimes, we could more actively imagine ourselves writing this chapter. Sometimes we couldn't. And when it seemed like we weren't sure what to say, we just kept writing (yes, we wrote for 30 minutes to an hour every week), knowing that we could use each other's and the reviewers' feedback to revise later. We used this process to think about the expectations of this particular kind of writing. But for us, this strategy was a starting point for getting words going and in tune with the tone of the task. We found that by becoming familiar with the way the other chapters were written, we drew on our own voices with those expectations and our hopes in mind.

Engaging this *tuning in* practice is not a matter of whether you can or "can't" write "like that." Tuning in is about acknowledging that you as a writer can work to identify how your fellow writers make their moves and how you will play yours based on that knowledge—and your own writing purpose. Surveying the situation can then help ease your writing anxieties as you are expected to lean back and analyze the form and function of these other texts, and how writers, like you, like us, play our cards. Sara conceives of this practice as "tuning in without losing your rhythm; remixing that song you like so much for your own good."

This process might look different for you; What's important is: 1) figuring out how you can best gain entry into the context of the situation by sizing it up; 2) negotiating a balance between the expectations of the writing situation and your hopes for your own voice, knowledge, and authority about what you feel is important to say about this topic.

Building a Writing Community

As much as our writing process is about what and how to do language, supporting ourselves throughout the process is equally important. After

all, if we can't make ourselves 'finish' (i.e., you have a 'finished' version of your writing), all of our efforts for workin' language won't be made visible to our readers. The resources to support our writing process can come in many forms and, therefore, can help us see how we can cultivate our writing space, even when it doesn't seem like it.

For instance, most writing assignments have their own requirements in formatting and content/organization that we are expected to meet. For this reason, when Sara feels that the writing isn't coming along, and she's "tried all the things," she often starts her writing process by checking on the style and structure requirements of writing assignments. Reflecting back on that very same Secondary Education course she took, Sara recalls the following memory: "I have several tabs open: 1) Wikipedia page on the school; 2) school's official website; 3) 2 PDFs which I've highlighted and read before about schooling and teaching writing in urban schools; 4) Purdue OWL's sample paper for MLA citation format; 5) Purdue OWL's guidelines for how to incorporate in-text citations. I begin with what seems easiest, likely of less importance, but it literally sets the page. Drawing on the sample paper from Purdue OWL and its instructions, I set up my first page in MLA format. In front of me is the hard copy of the assignment. I go over it, and create a "rough" outline of what I need."

Like Sara's example, the resources we draw on to complete a writing assignment can be set by the teacher or other authoritative models we need to consult (such as style guidelines), which may make us feel constrained in tuning into our experiences, positionalities, and language practices. However, we can still center who we are in other aspects of writing by considering how resources can be channeled through the people in our daily lives. You can design your own community of writers that can help you through the process of cultivating your voice and purpose in writing—a friend, a writing center tutor, a family member, someone who you trust and would like to share your ideas with, but also who knows you well and is willing to hear what you care about.

When Eunjeong feels stuck in fully expressing her argument and the connections among ideas, she often turns to her husband. More often than not, in the process of trying to explain, Eunjeong finds a way to resolve the connection she is trying to strengthen in her writing. But also in the process of explaining, her partner, who grew up in a different culture, language, and geographical setting, offer a series of questions or comments: "I saw a similar case for my cousin in [a rural town]"; "This may make sense in Korean, but to me, not sure because…"; "Mexicans do this, and I know my Indian friend's family did this when I was young"; "Why would

you use that word, but not X?"; "How does this relate to what you were talking about earlier?"; "Okay, so you are trying to say Z or something else?"; "What word would that translate to in Korean? Because in American English, I think it wouldn't translate easily."

These questions often guided Eunjeong to see where in her writing she needed to "spend more time." Also, importantly, the people that Eunjeong consults help her to continue writing in ways that acknowledge and amplify different values and experiences of her own and others, and ultimately help sustain her writing. The process and actual conversations in building your own writing community may look and sound different. But what's crucial is that by working our languages and ideas this way, we centralize not only our voice but also the voices of others who we trust and who care for/about our writing.

Finding Your Audience

We can center who we are in our writing not only through *what* we write about and *how* but also in considering who we are writing *for*. By this, we mean who motivates us to write, who would we want to share this piece of writing with, and who does this writing impact the most? Throughout our schooling, we learn to carry the assumption that we need to write for an "academic" audience that is far removed from our upbringing and community ways of knowing. But rarely are our families, friends, or other community members understood as part of our audience, although they are very the people, including ourselves, that academics learn from, and in turn, are supposed to serve.

What if we think of our audience beyond academics and actively write for people who we share our lived experiences with? What if we foreground their experiences, perspectives, and ways of using language in our writing and start thinking about how our writing impacts ourselves and our communities? These questions likely impact not only the way we understand what is expected of us as writers but also the way we write, including the words we choose, the examples we draw on, and even the amount of details necessary to explain an idea. With "academic" audiences, we often think the expectation is to show how much we *know* about a particular topic, using "scholarly" articles or other published accounts that support our argument (e.g., summarizing and interpreting a scholar's work, using quotes and statistics, etc.). Of course, thinking of our audience beyond academia does not mean we won't do any of this work. But when we see our writing reaching beyond our classroom or university, we can approach writing in a much more personally relevant and just way.

In our own work as educators and researchers, what motivates our research and writing are our own experiences in, with, and as a part of our communities. And along with many of you, we often ask the following questions to centralize our and our communities' ways of living, knowing, and doing language: How is the discussion in the textbook, articles, or mainstream media relevant to ourselves and our communities? How does what we're reading represent our unique experiences? For instance, one motivation for us to write this peer-reviewed chapter was that many texts for college writers reinforce *monolingual ideology* and what is "appropriate," rather than centering the rich language practices writers, like us, like you, already have.

Writing for our communities can also come down to how we do language in our writing to better reach our communities. This can mean that we might have to go beyond what's conventionally understood as an "essay," or even "writing." For instance, what languages should we use to make our writing most understood by our audience? Is our alphabetic writing the most impactful choice? Should we include images, sound, and colors? How can we best explain an idea? With whose words, stories, experiences, and examples, and in what language(s)?

How you can center yourself and your community in relation to who you're writing for can certainly go beyond these questions. But your decision to think about your audience beyond "academia" is a way to show that our families, friends, and people in our communities and their lives—their language and cultural practices, histories, and ways of living—and the knowledge from their lived experiences matter. More so, it is a way to confirm what we have learned along the way, that your voice, as connected with that of your communities, shapes and transforms academic writing. In this way, who we are addressing in our writing also becomes a way of demonstrating who matters in our lived realities and experience, in our lives, and who shapes who we are in our writing.

Closing Thoughts

The strategies we've discussed here will help you turn to your own translingual-oriented practices, which are, of course, embedded in your own lived experiences and worlds and the ways that you're already workin' languages. These approaches centralize your own practices so you can continue languaging and stance-taking away from the deficit perspective in the various writing tasks you might encounter as a student and as a writer in the world. And importantly, translingual stance-taking and workin' of languages is

a work toward linguistic justice for all—particularly for those of us whose languages are racialized in different ways. If the ways that we do language cannot be equal, then as a society we must collectively work to change that.

As you finish this chapter, we hope that you understand that self-doubt about your writing is more often about the people reading and judging your writing than it is about your writing practice. Instead of focusing on what you "lack," we encourage you to value your language and various experiences in different languages and think of yourself as language architects (Flores), drawing from the way you work with languages in your everyday life, in order to build writing where your full self, the strength of your voice, and the magnitude of your languaging is present, continuously "resistant" and amplified (Kinloch). And we hope you continue to carry that understanding and a loving gaze on your own writing and others'.

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Teacher Resources for "Workin' Languages: Who We Are Matters in Our Writing"

This essay was written to invite students, educators, and writing community members to become more conscientious of the power of laboring language, and the work required to move within and against the norms of academic writing. Our goal is to help students recognize the value in bringing themselves into these spaces and to provide strategies that students can use to rethink their own relationships with writing. Instructors can use this essay to help students develop awareness of the assumptions behind what we learn as constituting "academic language" or "academic writing" and to write about topics that have greater relevance to their lived experiences, as they also centralize their communities' voices and their own.

Questions and Strategies for Teachers

- A strategy that will not be immediately visible to students is the necessity of educators to rethink listening/reading practices when it comes to assessment, particularly with regard to racialization and language bias. The discussion about appropriateness from Flores and Rosa that we outline in the essay has direct implications for how educators assess student writing. How do we resist responding to student writing in a way that can reinforce, either inadvertently or directly, what has been constructed as appropriate in academic settings? How can we frame responses in a way that helps them build and navigate expectations that do not diminish them as writers?
- Assignments and activities can begin with thinking about students as "language architects" and build on the navigations with language that they are already doing in their everyday lives. These can include:
    - Assignments where students are remediating and remixing, giving them the opportunity to communicate in a variety of modes and media (Gonzales).
    - Making space in class design for students to practice and develop metacognition about their writing and linguistic choices and make connections between what they do in and out of the classroom. We often include guided writing in order to describe and provide a vocabulary for these processes

and give students the opportunity to practice them. We also assign reflective writing at the end of a formal assignment to allow students to articulate the practices that work best for them.

- Literacy narrative assignments, in this regard, can be a good place to encourage students to reflect on their experiences and relationships with different languages and literacies, while providing us, instructors, with an opportunity to better understand and begin conversations about "appropriate" language and ideologies that sustain such thinking.

- Writing assignments that build on students' existing knowledge and authority about language use. For example, a project that asks students to examine the role of writing in their communities or to study their own writing ecologies creates an opportunity for students to connect their own experiences to scholarly concepts in literacy and writing studies.

- Course design should actively work against deficit models and help students grow their identities as writers and language architects. Assignments and teacher feedback on student writing should address students as writers and frame all aspects of writing in terms of choice, context, and power, rather than right or wrong answers.
    - Classroom discussions can also invite students to actively discuss their experience with assessment and create a rubric or feedback points collaboratively, and these collaboratively built rubric or feedback points can be used during their peer review and teacher feedback practice.
    - The question of assessment of one's language and racialization can be also taken as a discussion point or even a writing assignment based on a reading that reflects different manifestations of linguistic racism and the consequences outside the school context such as in housing, healthcare, employment, and finance.

- Assigning readings from multilingual authors who reflect on or demonstrate their own movements in and across languages, including Englishes, is one way to show students how published authors cultivate (and do) the kind of writing that you're now asking them to do.

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Jamila Lyiscott, "Three Ways to Speak English" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9fmJ5xQ_mc

Suresh Canagarajah (ed.), *Transnational Literacy Autobiographies as Translingual Writing.*

Denice Frohman, "Accents" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtOXiNx4jgQ

Sandra Cisneros, "Only Daughter"

Aja Y. Martinez, "A Personal Reflection on Chican@ Language and Identity in the US-Mexico Borderlands: The English Language Hydra as Past and Present Imperialism." In *Why English? Confronting the Hydra* (pp. 211-219). Multilingual Matters.

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Discussion Questions

1. What is your current understanding of "good writing" and "a good writer?" What does "good writing" sound, look, and feel to you? And what do you think has shaped your current understanding? How do you think your understanding influences the way you approach your writing assignments in our/other classes?

2. Reflect on your experiences across different languages (e.g., Englishes, Spanishes, Black Languages, etc.) How are your relationships, experiences, and practices of these languages similar or different? What do you think shapes these different relationships, experiences, and practices?

3. Think about your last writing assignment. What was your process like? Who did you think about? What did you pay attention to? What did you particularly consider throughout the process?

4. Think back to a time when writing felt good, when communicating with someone felt comforting. Who were you writing to or communicating with? You can go back as early as primary school.

5. Imagine if none of the writing assignments in college were ever graded or read by your instructor, what would you like to communicate to the world? As you think about the people in your life and the moments your communities might be facing now, what feels important for you to write?
6. Consider your experiences with writing. What feelings come up? Examine these writing feelings. What emotions and experiences do these feelings prompt for you about writing?
7. What stalls your writing? Is it internal or external? What if you could speak to that "stalling" force? What would you say?
8. Can you describe any moments when you experienced or recognized linguistic injustice? How would you explain what happened? How might it have affected your future attempts to write or communicate with others?

2 Four Things Social Media Can Teach You about College Writing—and One Thing It Can't

Ann N. Amicucci

Overview

Many students are frequent users of social media, and it's important to recognize the rich rhetorical activity that happens on apps like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok.* This chapter teaches students how to take rhetorical moves they make on social media and mimic these moves in academic writing, such as riffing off successful example texts, gearing content to specific audiences, choosing how to shape one's ethos, and making stylistic choices that enhance the message of a piece of writing. By reading this essay, students will better understand the choices they make in composing text and images for social media and how those same choices can be applied to make their academic writing strong.

Have you ever had a writing assignment to work on but you find yourself scrolling through social media instead? You might think of social media as completely separate from the writing you do for college, but the truth is, the two aren't that different. Sure, social media posts aren't multiple pages long, double-spaced, or in MLA or APA Style. But the choices you make as a composer of text and images online are the same choices you need to make as a college writer. In this essay, I'll show you how to take what you already know from writing on social media and use it to level up as a writer. I want to make college writing less of a mystery

and help you learn techniques to stand out as a writer by building on what you already know.

Inter-What?

Before we dive into social media, there are two important concepts you need to understand: intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Both of these concepts refer to how writers borrow stuff from other writers:

- *intertextuality* happens when you *explicitly* borrow ideas or material from another text, which automatically links what you're writing to something else. Examples of intertextuality include:
    - quoting words or paraphrasing ideas from someone else's writing.
    - using photos or graphic images like charts or memes that someone else created.
    - calling back or alluding to specific texts like songs, movies, books, or tv shows.

- *interdiscursivity* happens when you *implicitly* borrow or riff off the rhetorical choices of another text or writer. Examples of interdiscursivity include:
    - formatting your paper and citations in a certain way because other texts do it.
    - starting your writing with a quote or statistic because you've seen articles do this successfully.
    - using features in your writing like funny side jokes or rhetorical questions that play off how other authors use these same features.

So why do intertextuality and interdiscursivity matter? Both these concepts are the ways your writing is networked with other texts and writers. Nothing you write exists in a vacuum. Instead, everything you write builds on ideas and texts that have come before and makes use of rhetorical choices or moves—strategies used to strengthen writing—other writers have had success with.

Here's what I mean: Let's say I'm writing a tweet about a restaurant I just tried (see figure 1). The *intertextual* parts of the tweet are the places where I specifically reference something else, like the chef, the tv show *Guy's Grocery Games*, the name of the restaurant, and the city I live in. If I were to throw in a quote from a judge on the tv show or from the restaurant

menu, that would also be intertextual content. Think of how each reference puts what I'm writing into a relationship with other texts in the world. Each makes my piece of writing one point in a big web of information that references these same things.



Figure 1. Example drafted tweet with intertextual and interdiscursive content. The text reads: "No wonder Chef Brenner won #guysgrocerygames. Food at @ redgravyco rocks! Meatballs and fig pizza ftw. #coloradospringseats Image credit: Ann N. Amicucci.

The *interdiscursive* parts of the tweet are the places where I use rhetorical moves I'm borrowing from other writers, like using hashtags, tagging the restaurant with its Twitter handle, and using the abbreviation "ftw" in place of "for the win." These moves also put what I'm writing into a relationship with other texts and writers. Using hashtags shows I'm familiar with Twitter discourse, and using the abbreviation "ftw" might signal that I'm a gamer. Each interdiscursive move is a chance to get "in" with certain groups or to show that I'm not cool enough to be part of them. More on this in a minute.

You have lots of practice in writing with *intertextual* content for school. Every research paper you've written has likely used quotes, paraphrases, and even images or graphs from other sources. And you likely make intertextual references all the time by referring to popular culture or other texts to explain your ideas to your readers.

But you may not realize that you also have practice in using *interdiscursive* content on social media by imitating the rhetorical choices other texts make. In the following sections, I'll explain how you can flex your interdiscursive writing muscles by bringing what you know from social media, regardless of what platforms you use, into your college writing projects.

Riff Off a Challenge

When I was writing this essay in 2020, TikTok was a popular app for sharing 60-second videos. When a new challenge emerges on a video platform

like TikTok, you have to study its parts before you can copy it. As users replicate a challenge again and again, they riff off the challenge's core moves, often mixing things up to make the challenge their own. A challenge video contains intertextual content: you're using the name of the challenge that other people have used and often using the same soundtrack. But the process of imitating the challenge is interdiscursive work: you're mimicking the format and components of a challenge but improvising changes to give your video a personal stamp.

Here's an example. In the 2020 Stand Up Challenge popularized by Demi Bagby, two people work together to do a series of jumps to the song "Woah" by Krypto9095 featuring D3Mstreet. The challenge starts with one person lying on the ground and the other standing on the first person's back, then with each move, the top person jumps up while the bottom person changes position until the top person stands on the bottom person's shoulders, then jumps off and lands on the ground. As people recreated and riffed off this challenge, some users replicated the moves exactly while others did the series of jumps with pets or babies, some shared fail videos of when the moves didn't work, and others created more complex versions of the challenge, like doing the moves in an indoor skydiving chamber (@ twosdayswithtk).

When you start working on a college essay, pick an essay you admire to be your "challenge" essay that—like a TikTok challenge—you can replicate and make your own. You might pick a published essay you've read for class or an example student essay shared by your teacher. Your job isn't to copy the essay, but to figure out its moves and meet the challenge by replicating those moves in your own way (see figure 2). As Craig A. Meyer explains, "In studying several authors or samples, we learn from each one's strengths and weaknesses. Imitation is more than just copying down a selection of writing—it's digging into the prose, pulling it apart, and understanding why it works the way that it does" (124). When you riff off a challenge essay, you're still writing your own text—you're simply using a successful formula to do so. Of course, you don't want to simply copy a successful formula without considering the context for your writing. As you become more comfortable imitating successful rhetorical choices, you should reflect on how to adapt the rhetorical moves you riff off from other essays to best fit each writing project you take on.

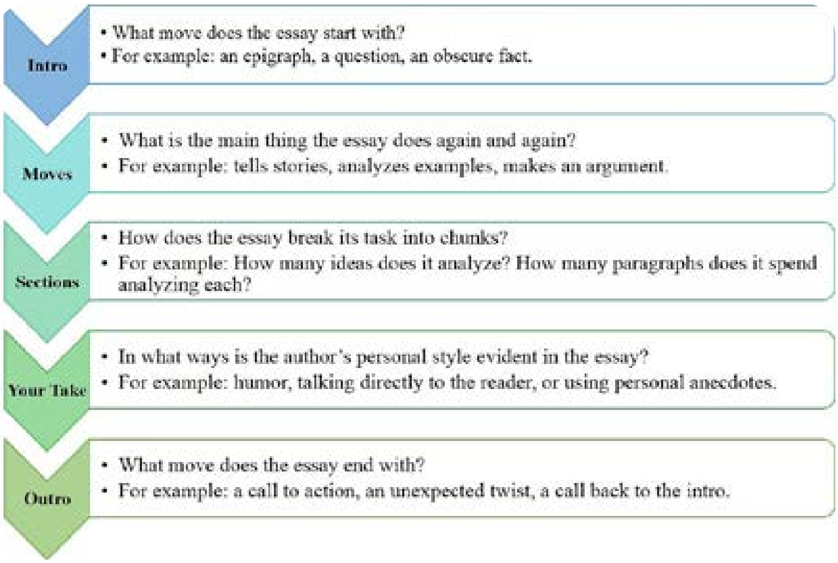


Figure 2. Questions to ask to replicate an essay's rhetorical moves. The text reads: "Intro": "What move does the essay start with?" "For example: an epigraph, a question, an obscure fact." "Moves": "What is the main thing the essay does again and again?" "For example: tells stories, analyzes examples, makes an argument." "Sections": "How does the essay break its task into chunks?" "For example: How many ideas does it analyze? How many paragraphs does it spend analyzing each?" "Your Take": "In what ways is the author's personal style evidence in the essay?" "For example: humor, talking directly to the reader, or using personal anecdotes." "Outro": "What move does the essay end with?" "For example: a call to action, an unexpected twist, a call back to the intro." Image credit: Ann N. Amicucci.

Know Your Hashtag Audiences

Remember earlier when I used "ftw" in a tweet? Maybe you'd never heard that acronym before. Maybe it's an abbreviation you like and use often. Maybe you think it's ridiculous and rolled your eyes. Each language choice a writer makes marks that writer as an insider in some groups and an outsider in others—like if you're a gamer who uses the acronym ftw, you might assume I'm a gamer, too.

Groups of people that share a common purpose and use language in specific ways to communicate with members of their group are called *discourse communities*. Dan Melzer describes them this way:

> "Guitar players" or "people who like music" or even "guitarists in Sacramento, California" are not discourse communities. They don't share the same goals, and they don't all interact with each other to meet the same goals. . . . But a Meetup.com group like the Sacramento acoustic guitar jam focused on a specific topic with shared goals and a community of members who frequently interact can be considered a discourse community. (102-03)

Melzer explains that in his acoustic guitar jam Meetup, members used specialized words and explanations like "root note of scale" and "putting a capo on different frets" so they could achieve their group goals. He writes, "We didn't use this language to show off or to try to discourage outsiders from joining our group. We needed these specialized terms—this musician's lexis—to make sure we were all playing together effectively" (105). All those specialized ways of using language are interdiscursive action: rhetorical moves to show you're a member of a certain group because you use language in the same way as other members.

Discourse communities work the same way on social media. We use language in specific ways to connect with people who share our interests and to achieve goals in interest-related groups. On Instagram and other platforms, using hashtags to link your posts to related posts is an interdiscursive move. You make a rhetorical move every time you choose to use hashtags in general, decide when and how to use them, and decide which to use. Further, you make interdiscursive rhetorical choices in composing a photo and a photo caption to participate as a member of certain hashtag communities.

For example, in a post about her latest mural, artist Jeresneyka Rose, whose handle is @ArtByRizzo, selects a series of photos showing herself painting the mural and the completed project (see figure 3). She captions the photo, "Growing & Glowing 🌼 First Mural of 2020 💙.



Figure 3. Instagram post showing use of multiple hashtags. Post by @artbyrizzo (Jeresneyka Rose).

Timelapse uploaded to IGTV!" and includes nineteen hashtags at the end of the caption. Her hashtags include general tags like #indoormural, tags specific to who she is as an artist like #blackwomanart, and tags specific to her community like #coloradospringsartist.

Rose's post as a whole has a purpose: to celebrate and circulate her art. What's more, each part of the post involves specific interdiscursive rhetorical choices that have multiple, finer-grained purposes of linking the post with discourse communities. Think about how each hashtag represents a different community and the ways those communities overlap. For example, #blackart represents a huge worldwide community of Black artists, #coloradospringsartist represents a much smaller, local community, and some artists belong to both (see figure 4). When Rose uses multiple hashtags, she is composing content that works in each tag separately as well as in the space where tags intersect.

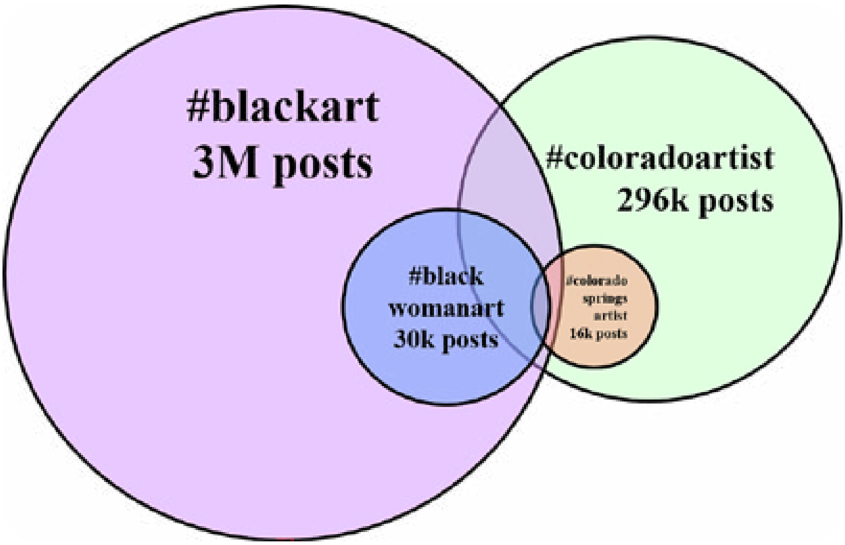


Figure 4. A Venn diagram showing how four hashtag communities overlap. Image credit: Ann N. Amicucci.

The content of Rose's photo and what she writes in her caption not only need to make sense for the groups she's connecting to; this content also needs to get those groups' attention and work within those groups' shared goals. The positive message of Rose's mural—which shows a Black woman nourishing herself from a watering can of self love—combined with Rose's smile, the peace sign she makes with her fingers, and the flower and heart emoji in her caption all show her desire to work toward a goal of empowerment of and positivity among Black women and artists.

So what does this mean for you as a college writer? When you write an essay, think about what hashtags you'd use to label it if it were a post. What topics does your essay connect with, and what groups of people are interested in those topics? Decide how you'll shape the ideas in your essay and your language choices to fit the groups of people you're trying to reach. If it seems like your assignment is only asking you to write to your teacher, consider the multiple audience groups your teacher belongs to, such as education professionals, residents of your area, or members of a group that engage in a certain hobby or interest. Even when you're directing your writing to one person, that one person belongs to multiple audience groups.

You can also invent a more specific audience for yourself. For example, if you're given an assignment to analyze a political cartoon, think about the multiple groups you could gear this analysis toward. If you're writing

to middle school students to teach them how to read political cartoons critically, you'll use different ideas and language than if you're writing to your campus newspaper to propose that cartoons should become a regular feature. Present every idea and make every language choice in your essay with your specific hashtag audience or audiences in mind.

Pick Your Filters

If you've read up to this point, you know that two ways you can take what you know from social media into your college writing are to 1) pick a challenge essay to riff off and 2) identify hashtag audiences to connect with. Here's a third way: Decide what version of yourself you want to be in your essay, and choose filters to make yourself appear a certain way.

Imagine you're composing a selfie on Snapchat or another app with a range of filters to choose from. You have so many choices to make just in the photo alone: whether to smile, whether to show only yourself or include your background, how to angle your camera, and so on. Once you decide how to pose, you might scroll through the lens options to filter your face or give yourself animal ears, then you'll choose whether to add stickers, a caption, or a frame for your photo.

Let's say I've just gotten home from a long hike on a hot day and I create a snap. I could choose a flattering lens, inspirational stickers, and a congratulatory caption to portray myself as a determined go-getter who has just achieved a big goal (see figure 5), or I could use a funny lens and a more honest caption and stickers to reveal how exhausted I am and portray myself as light-hearted and self-deprecating (see figure 6). Each choice I make shapes my ethos: the way I'm constructing my own character through my snap.



Figures 5. Snapchat rhetorical choices made to portray a determined self.



Figure 6. Snapchat rhetorical choices made to portray self-deprecation. Image credits: Ann N. Amicucci.

The same is true when you're writing a college essay. You have to decide how to present yourself and whether you want to present a simple (no filters) or gussied-up (sparkles and animal ears galore) version of your character in a particular piece of writing. The genre you're writing in and how much freedom you have within that genre will guide what choices you have in constructing your ethos. If you're able to include multimedia in your essay, consider how you can send different messages about yourself in your writing by choosing to include a soundtrack, photos that you take of your subject, or a diagram or graph that you draw by hand or create in PowerPoint. If multimedia composing isn't an option, shape your ethos through your language: Choose words, phrases, and sentence types that enable you to be formal or funny or anywhere in between.

Let's say you're writing an essay that analyzes the rhetorical strengths of Sojourner Truth's speech "Ain't I a Woman?" Truth was a slave who escaped and became a travelling preacher and activist for antislavery and women's rights ("Sojourner"). You already know what argument you want

to make in your essay—that Truth uses appeals to religious and family values to soften men in her audience to the idea of women's rights. But who do *you* want to be in making this argument? Perhaps you could use a filter I'll call "The Activist." To portray yourself as a strident advocate for women's rights (regardless of whether you identify as a woman), you could discuss how Truth's work set the stage for today's advocacy for women by sharing an anecdote of your experiences with the struggle for women's rights and including a photo of you or someone you know participating in a women's rights rally. Or you could go in a completely different direction and use a filter I'll call "The Wanderer." To portray yourself as a person journeying through life in search of meaning, you could use an epigraph from environmental writer Rebecca Solnit and subheadings like "Setting a Path," "A Fork in the Road," and "The End of the Journey" to highlight the role of Truth's travel in strengthening her message.

Your filter will also shape what evidence from the speech you include in your essay. Arguing from an activist position may lead you to quote passages that draw readers' attention to the injustices Truth faced. Arguing from a position of your own journey, however, may lead you to put those same passages in your own words or select different sections of the text to discuss altogether. Adding a photo, using certain subheadings, or selecting different quotes are only a few of the choices you'll make based on how you're presenting your own ethos. Think of the countless choices you make in taking and posting a photo; you make a similar list of choices in deciding how to present yourself in an essay.

You can use either of these filters for your ethos, and the central argument in your essay stays the same. What changes is the character of the writer making that argument. Keep in mind that there's never a piece of writing where you aren't present. Even if you aren't using the first person pronoun "I," you're always a part of your own writing—so decide what filters you want to use on yourself in your essay.

Say More Through Symbols

On social media, we use emoji and stickers to add meaning to the words and images we share. If I post about traffic making me late to a family event and include a sad face emoji, you'd know I'm disappointed (see figure 7). But if I include a winking face and a celebration emoji, you'd understand that I'm happy to be late to the picnic—and you might even wonder if I'm making up the traffic as an excuse (see figure 7). Emoji and

other symbols tell readers how the content of your writing on social media should be read.

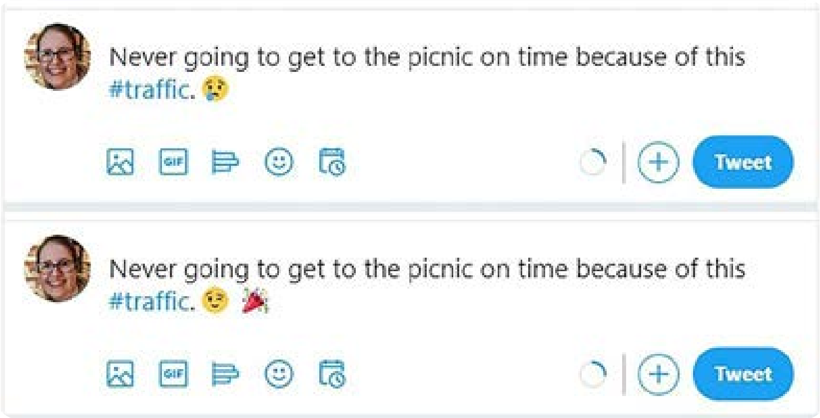


Figure 7. The same drafted tweet shown with different emoji that change the tweet's message. Image credit: Ann N. Amicucci.

Look at the tweet in Figure 8 from my campus, which shows an image of students in the 1960s waiting in line to register for classes. The surprised face emoji that appears in the tweet tells us to be shocked by what we see: by both the length of the line and the fact that people had to show up to a particular building to register for classes in person.

Now, notice the other composing choices that went into this post. The picture is a black and white photo from the 1960s, and no words or stickers have been added to it. The middle third of the photo shows students in line, but the photo hasn't been cropped to focus only on the line of students. Instead, the parts of the photo that show us features of campus at the time—trees, grass, a building—have been left in to show that my university's alumni association is interested not only in saying something about how registration worked at the time but in giving us a view of campus in the 1960s as well. Take a moment to imagine how you could shift the message of this post if you used different emoji, chose punctuation other than a period at the end of the tweet, or cropped the photo.



Figure 8. A tweet from a college alumni association. Tweet by @UCCSAlumni (University of Colorado Colorado Springs Alumni Association). Image credit: University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

So how can you apply similar choices to your college writing? Let's say you need to write an essay about something you've observed at your college. It's unlikely that you'll use emoji in your essay, but you will use punctuation to signal to your readers how to interpret your message. Kevin Cassell explains that when you notice punctuation while you read, you'll discover how punctuation marks work rhetorically. Referring to a paragraph in his *Writing Spaces* essay, Cassell writes:

> Some of [the punctuation marks] I had to use to meet standard usage expectations: periods to end sentences, apostrophes to make contractions or show possession, question marks to indicate ques-

> tions, and commas to set apart clauses. Other punctuation marks I used—like the em dash, exclamation points, italics, ellipses, quotation marks to create emphasis, and even the parentheses—were optional, *rhetorical choices* I made to emphasize certain things and give my writing a colloquial style. (9)

In making rhetorical choices among all the punctuation marks Cassell names, you'll communicate meaning to your readers.

Let's say you're a student in your thirties and you decide to use your essay to make recommendations for how your college's website could better fit the needs of older students. If you want readers to interpret your essay as that of an indignant student who is demanding change immediately, you might use question marks to frame your statements as rhetorical questions or use italics to call attention to words that highlight the urgency of your request. However, if you want to frame your essay as a thoughtful description of your experiences—not necessarily an accusation or an indication that anyone is in the wrong—you might use em dashes, such as those in this sentence, to include thoughtful asides, or ellipses to show pauses in your own thought process as you navigated the website.

You can write multiple versions of an essay that make the same argument that the website should be revised to better suit the needs of older college students. Yet the choices you make in punctuation add layers of meaning to your words and help your readers understand how to interpret your message, just as emoji clue readers into the real message in tweets.

Don't Cut Your Ideas Short

So far in this essay, I've taught you four techniques for bringing your social media composing skills into college writing. Before I go, I want to mention one thing you *shouldn't* take from social media into your academic essays. On social media, it's common for writers to share an idea without saying much about the idea itself. I can post a pic of a doughnut with the caption "I love doughnuts" without needing to say *why* I love them, and no one will think it's strange. But in college writing, the opposite is true: You need to include the *why.*

No matter what subject your essay is on, you'll be making claims throughout it. A claim might be an opinion ("I think our campus is great"), an argument ("Rose empowers Black female artists through her Instagram posts"), or even a proposal ("No one should take the TikTok Stand Up Challenge"). Each time you make a claim, you have to include reasons to

support your claim and evidence to support your reasons. An easy way to make sure you do this is to draft your essay, then go back and reread what you've written. After every single sentence, ask yourself the questions "How?" and "Why?" If the sentence that follows explains the how or why, you're good to go. But if the how and why aren't present, you need to add more content to explain and justify your claims.

The next time you're scrolling through social media instead of working on an essay, pay attention to the choices made in each post. Then dive into your academic writing: Study the essays you're reading for class and notice their rhetorical moves so you can riff off them. Think about your hashtag audiences, choose filters to shape your ethos in your writing, and use punctuation to shape your message. Just don't forget to include the *why*! Playing off of social media's strongest features while also explaining and justifying your ideas fully will give you the best chance of being a strong writer in college.

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Teacher Resources for "Four Things Social Media Can Teach You About College Writing—and One Thing It Can't"

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This essay invites students to consider how the rhetorical moves they make on social media can be transferred to academic writing. The essay aims to demystify academic writing by helping students see that similar rhetorical processes happen across all writing genres and that academic writing tasks aren't divorced from everyday writing practices. The essay can be taught as part of a unit on literacy narratives or other investigations of students' existing literacy practices, alongside lessons on style and rhetorical experimentation, or in conjunction with other course content that focuses on social media or multimodal composing.

I find that when students are asked to reflect critically on their social media writing practices, they are perceptive of a range of rhetorical choices they make in adapting digital content to fit audience expectations or to provoke audience reactions. Yet students are less practiced in carrying these rhetorical choices into academic writing or in seeing connections between everyday digital writing and more formal academic prose. I recommend beginning an assignment sequence or class discussion by asking students to reflect on and analyze their own digital composing choices prior to assigning this essay, then following students' reading of the essay with discussion or writing about specific rhetorical moves students can bring from their social media practices into a college assignment.

One area where teachers may encounter resistance is from students who avoid or opt out of social media. When I encounter students who aren't inclined toward social media participation, I ask them to reflect more broadly on their everyday writing practices such as texting, making to do lists, writing emails, writing notes to family members, and on everyday rhetorical choices such as selecting clothing and accessories. While some students may not participate in the literacy practices the essay describes in networked spaces, all make rhetorical choices in self-sponsored writing and in composing their own persona each day that they can apply to college writing projects.

Discussion Questions

1. Choose a social media platform you participate in, and make a list of all the groups of people who read your writing on this platform. In addition to the forms of social media listed in the article, consider whether you participate in LinkedIn, Pinterest, Yelp, dating sites, or gaming sites. Draw a Venn diagram to show how your audience groups are related and whether and how they overlap.
2. The essay suggests choosing a "challenge essay" to imitate in your own writing. What nonfiction text have you read that you'd like to imitate as a writer? Return to this text, skim it, and make a list of the rhetorical moves the author uses that you'd like to imitate. Which rhetorical moves will be the most difficult to accomplish, and why?
3. Find a tweet that uses at least one emoji or at least one punctuation mark. Rewrite the tweet five times, using different symbols or punctuation each time. Explain how your choices change the meaning of the tweet in each version.

   For more discussion of how changing punctuation changes a sentence's meaning, read Kevin Cassell's *Writing Spaces* essay "Punctuation's Rhetorical Effects."
4. The essay discusses the difference between intertextual references and interdiscursive rhetorical practices in writing. Consider the outfit you're wearing today. Which elements of your outfit are intertextual? That is, which parts of your clothing or accessories specifically reference other existing texts? Which elements of your outfit are interdiscursive? In other words, what rhetorical choices did you make in assembling your outfit that mimic or riff off others' rhetorical choices?
5. Each Snapchat lens that filters your image has a name, like Starry Sunlight, which casts an amber color on a photo and makes small gold sparkles appear on the screen. Think of how you presented yourself in the last academic essay you wrote. What name would you give to the "filter" you used for your own presentation in that piece of writing, and how would you describe that filter? What name would you give to the filter you'd like to use to present yourself in your current writing course, and how would you describe it?

3 Effectively and Efficiently Reading the Credibility of Online Sources

Ellen Carillo and Alice Horning

Overview

Because reading and writing are related interpretive practices, attending to critical reading is an important part of teaching writing.* This chapter defines critical reading and offers students strategies for undertaking a specific kind of critical reading, namely reading for credibility, particularly of online sources. The chapter gives examples of the importance of reading for credibility in a variety of situations, including one's day-to-day life and while engaged in academic projects. Specifically, students are introduced to what is called "lateral reading," an approach that helps students determine a source's credibility by leaving the source and seeing what is said about it elsewhere on the Web. To support this approach, the chapter provides definitions of misinformation and disinformation, addresses the difference between primary and secondary sources, and teaches students the importance of recognizing bias in sources and in themselves.

Both of us writing this chapter are scholars who teach our own students that good reading skills are essential to developing effective writing abilities. We have both published books and articles in this area and over the years have claimed to know a lot about the best ways to teach critical reading. With this background, you would think that we'd both be really effective critical readers, but Alice recently had her come-uppance at the hands of the Internet. Here's what happened: At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when information about ways to stay safe was

being circulated, Alice received an e-mail from a colleague she considers a highly reliable source. The message had been forwarded to her colleague from someone purporting to be a physician whose daughter works in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins, one of the nation's leading hospitals. It seemed like a good source: it contained a number of pieces of familiar, general advice about handwashing, social distancing, and masks, all information we have heard dozens of times. But it also contained what Alice later realized was some suspicious advice for killing the virus. For instance: "Any mix with 1 part bleach and 5 parts water directly dissolves the protein, breaks it down from the inside," and "UV LIGHT on any object that may contain it breaks down the virus protein." The email also described how alcohol could be used to kill the virus, but warned in all caps, "NO SPIRITS, NOR VODKA" but "Listerine will work—65% alcohol" ("Covid Precautions").

Looking back now, Alice realizes that various other wacky points appeared in the message. Still, she sent it along to friends and family including her daughters, one of whom is a public health nurse. Her daughter fired back quite soon to point out an assortment of errors and misleading claims, noting that she and her professional colleagues were very concerned about the amount of misinformation and disinformation being passed around in just this way. As a reading scholar who has taught others about the importance of credible sources, Alice was appalled and embarrassed. She had to send follow-up messages telling one and all to disregard what she had just sent. Where, oh where, were *her* critical reading skills?

Alice's daughter's response also points to two words that sound a lot alike, but actually mean two different things. In the *MLA Guide to Digital Literacy*, Ellen has defined these terms carefully and we want you to have these definitions in mind as you read this chapter because they will help you understand the two different ways you can be misled by information on the Web: "Both [misinformation and disinformation] describe factually incorrect information. The difference between the two is intent. Disinformation involves maliciously spreading wrong information. Misinformation is incorrect information, but it is not spread with malicious intent" (Carillo 13). Among all of the credible information on the Web there is also misinformation and disinformation, and critical reading skills are crucial to identifying the differences. We will come back to these terms a bit later, but we hope you will keep them, as well as Alice's cautionary tale, in mind.

What Do We Mean by Critical Reading?

You may be thinking to yourself, "I already know how to read." We realize that if you are reading this chapter you are likely in college and have been reading—as in decoding language—for more than a decade, maybe more than two or three decades. Critical reading is different from just reading or decoding language, though. Critical reading is really an umbrella term—an expansive and encompassing term—for focused, purposeful, and deep reading practices. In other words, critical reading is more than simply passing your eyes over words. This chapter will teach you about reading for credibility, one kind of critical reading. Specifically, we will describe how "reading laterally"—or across many sources—can help you judge the credibility of a single source and find quality information online.

What Is Credibility?

If a source is credible, that means it is trustworthy. While you can trust the nonfiction and informational texts (e.g., textbooks and scholarly articles) that your instructors assign because these have likely already been vetted—or approved—by experts in that field, you will often find yourself in the position of needing to locate additional sources as you conduct research in a first-year writing course or as you move into your chosen major. The Web has plenty of credible information on it, but the sheer volume of information can make the process of finding this information more challenging. What we say in this chapter to help you judge a source's credibility is applicable across disciplines and even in your personal life, too, as evidenced by the example that opened this chapter.

Moving Beyond Your Source to Evaluate Its Credibility

There are many ways of evaluating sources, some of which you are likely familiar with. You may have experience applying different kinds of checklists—such as the CRAAP (Credibility, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) Checklist, which allows you to determine whether the source you are reading is "CRAAP." This approach, wherein you ask a series of questions about the source and answer these questions by looking more closely at the source itself, has been used for decades, but as Stanford University researcher Sarah McGrew and her colleagues explain:

> the checklist approach falls short because it underestimates just how sophisticated the web has become. Worse, the approach trains students' attention on the website itself, thus cutting them off from the most efficient route to learning more about a site: finding out what the rest of the web has to say (after all, that's why we call it a web). (7)

To replace this outdated approach, these educators offer what they call "lateral reading," which, instead, involves leaving the source and moving to other sources across (i.e., laterally) the Web to assess the source's credibility.

McGrew and her colleague Sam Wineburg at Stanford introduced the concept of "lateral reading" after they conducted a study of how three different groups of people assessed the credibility of sources, among other tasks. Wineburg and McGrew gave professional fact checkers, Stanford undergraduate students, and historians with PhDs various digital sources that addressed social and political issues and asked them to evaluate them in various ways, including for credibility. Wineburg and McGrew observed how these three groups did so. They found that the undergraduates and historians took the traditional "vertical" approach to assessment, remaining tethered to the single source/site and looked closely—up and down it in a vertical fashion—to consider the different elements of the source itself, including site design; whether there were any errors or typos; and if the source included references. The professional fact checkers, however, immediately left the source to assess its credibility. They opened tab after tab to search for information about the source, including about the site's sponsoring organization and the author (Wineburg and McGrew 19). They also reviewed references to the source, site, organization, or author they found elsewhere (Wineburg and McGrew 19).

Professional fact-checkers capitalize on what the Web has to offer—a seemingly limitless number of other sources to use for the purpose of cross-referencing and corroboration. This practice holds promise for students as well (Rodrigue; Wineburg and McGrew; McGrew et al.; Caulfield). In the following sections, we share some steps for taking this approach to reading the credibility of online sources.

Steps for Reading Laterally to Assess the Credibility of Online Sources

1. Leave the site to do a quick check as to whether it appears on other fact-checking or hoax-busting sites. This step can save you a lot of time, especially if someone has already reported the site. You

may already be familiar with Snopes, perhaps the most well-known fact-checking site, but there are other nonpartisan sites such as PolitiFact and FactCheck.org that can be helpful, too.

2. Leave the site in question to explore more about the author of the piece. What can you find out about the author elsewhere on the Web? Does the author seem like an expert on the subject? What else has the author written? Is the author affiliated with any organizations or groups? How might this information allow you to recognize any biases the author may have?

3. Leave the site in question to explore more about the site itself. If you did not locate the site on one of the fact-checking sites listed above, then do a simple Google search. What can you find out about the site? Who or what (i.e., a company or organization) sponsors or owns the site? Does that ownership suggest any biases? What seems to be the intended purpose of the site? Is the site selling anything? Who is the audience for the site? Are visitors to the site looking to purchase something? Does a commercial aspect the site may have potentially conflict with the information it provides?

As you move through these steps you want to do so deliberately and "take your bearings" as you do so. The successful fact checkers in Wineburg and McGrew's study regularly took their bearings, which amounted to making a plan for moving forward (12). Applying the steps above, the following plan emerges: Beginning with #1, keep track of any fact-checking sites that suggest the source/site in question is not credible. As you move onto #2 and #3 to other sites where you read about the author and the site in question, track the credibility of those sites, too. Move outward from them to read about those sites on at least three other sites or until you feel confident and have not found any conflicting information about their credibility. Make notes as you go. Finally, review your notes in order to make an informed determination about the credibility of the source in question.

Recognizing the Difference Between Primary Sources and Secondary Sources While Reading Laterally

As you are reading laterally you will likely encounter both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources provide first-hand or direct information and include photographs, video and audio recordings, letters, diaries, government documents, speeches, historical documents, pieces of literature,

art, research studies, and interviews. Secondary sources offer secondary accounts of the information or evidence in a primary source. Secondary sources are *about* primary sources. Secondary sources include book and movie reviews, scholarly articles about novels, and news stories about scientific studies. Secondary sources summarize, interpret, or draw on primary sources in some way.

Going to a primary source can be an important part of reading laterally because it will allow you to recognize bias in the secondary sources you locate, which is important to judging the credibility of a source (more on that below). While finding different perspectives on a subject in the form of secondary sources is useful—and your instructor may require you to locate secondary sources—going to the primary source allows you to first form your own judgments, interpretations, and conclusions without being swayed by what others think. For example, an article that draws on a scientific study may contain a hyperlink to that study, the primary source. By reading the study before you read the article *about* the study (the secondary source) you can form your own ideas without allowing the article to influence you. Even if a secondary source does not contain a hyperlink to the primary source you can usually locate the primary source by consulting the reference information included either in the secondary source or on a reference page at its end. The Web is filled with secondary sources, which sometimes makes it difficult to find primary sources, but locating primary sources while reading laterally will give you the freedom to form your own judgments about the information rather than relying on a secondary source to do so for you.

Using Lateral Reading to Determine the Credibility of Online Images

Lateral reading is a useful practice when it comes to determining the credibility of online images, too. The saying goes, "seeing is believing," but with so many ways to manipulate images, seeing is no longer believing. Unfortunately, some primary sources, such as photographs, may be manipulated by Photoshop and other software that has become widely available. Photoshop and similar software have been used in many ways and to a range of ends. For example, Fox News cropped President Donald Trump from a picture in which he appears alongside convicted sex traffickers Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislane Maxwell (Davidoff Studios/Getty Images). You can see the original picture contains four people, including Trump, and the cropped picture, which appeared during a Fox News program, contains all but Trump (Fox News). Fox News later apologized for what was described

as an error. In other instances, two or more photographs have been merged to do the exact opposite— to put someone alongside another person or people in order to discredit them. For example, as Senator John Kerry was campaigning for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2004, a picture of him from 1971 was merged with a picture of Jane Fonda from 1972 (Mikkelson). The composite was intended to discredit Kerry, a Vietnam War veteran, by placing him alongside Fonda who was an anti-Vietnam war activist and thought to be unpatriotic by many Americans.

You can conduct a reverse image search on the Web to validate the authenticity of images, which, when paired with lateral reading, can give you insight into a photograph's credibility. Google's support pages offer specific instructions. Conducting a reverse image search will render a list of other places on the Web where the image appears. You can then read laterally to locate the original image, as well as other versions of that image, which will help you establish the credibility of the image in question.

You can use the same lateral reading approach to assess the credibility of videos. You may have heard of deepfake videos, which are videos that have been manipulated to show people saying and doing things that they did not actually do. Deepfake technology is advancing very quickly, making it difficult to discern a video that has been manipulated. As of writing this chapter, the best way to recognize a deepfake video is to look for inconsistencies between what people are saying in the video and what they have said in other contexts; depending on when you're reading this, you may need to search for more ways to recognize deepfakes based on rapidly changing technology. Reading laterally to locate those other contexts—whether videos, articles, or interviews—will help you recognize these inconsistencies. Additionally, recognizing inconsistencies in the video itself can also suggest that it has been manipulated, whether the lighting seems to change throughout, or the way the person's face or eyes are illuminated changes over the course of the video (Sample). There may also be more glaring issues, including bad lip-syncing. The point is that we are seeing disinformation circulate at a faster pace than ever before and the technologies to manipulate images and videos are moving at a similarly fast pace. Be cautious with primary sources, particularly if the source is a photograph or video, and be sure to use available resources, including the lateral reading approach, to assess credibility.

Addressing Bias While Reading Laterally

Reading laterally can help you assess the credibility of everything from news articles to videos, but as you read laterally, you need to recognize how bias informs both what you read and how you read. You are likely familiar with the term "bias," usually thought of as a personal opinion or preference that makes it impossible to see an idea objectively. Keep in mind the difference between biased information and incorrect information. While biased information is skewed in some way, incorrect information is just plain wrong. Although some media outlets have been criticized because of their dissemination of incorrect information, bias is the more common culprit. For example, a few minutes on Fox News, MSNBC and the PBS Newshour will give you a sense of bias, particularly if you are careful to watch the reporting on the same event. One helpful resource for considering the potential bias in news sources is the free, basic version of the Interactive Media Bias chart, which gives an overview of many news outlets and their relative political positions, which provide insight into their biases.

Beyond recognizing the role bias plays across media outlets, you will also need to be able to negotiate bias when completing source-driven writing assignments in your classes. Suppose your class has been discussing the regulation of the Internet, and you are assigned to investigate the controversial subject of Internet privacy protection. You know personal information, financial status, and health issues should be stored securely. However, businesses might want access to this information in order to offer you products and services related to your needs as revealed by your searches. Each side would be biased in its own favor, and your job as a critical reader is to provide a fair discussion of these differing views of appropriate regulation. Remember that you cannot somehow remove bias from these sources. Instead, your role is to recognize the bias in each perspective, consider its effect on the source's credibility, and negotiate it as you develop your own point of view or argument.

If you are writing about the regulation of the Internet, for example, you would want to begin by searching for sources on the subject. An article by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) will give you an overview of Internet privacy legislation, including by state, while an article from a different source, ProPublica, will give you a more targeted and detailed look at how Facebook seeks to protect its users' privacy through policies that prohibit advertisers from misusing the platform ("Status of Internet Privacy Legislation By State"; Angwin and Parris). Reading vertically on each site's "About" link will give you a sense of who is behind each site, but as

we have pointed out, reading vertically is problematic. For example, while the ACLU claims to be a non-partisan, nonprofit organization engaged in defense of civil liberties, a lateral search of critics of the ACLU produces a 2020 article by the overtly conservative Heritage Foundation that makes clear that the ACLU has its own biases (Canaparo). In other words, moving beyond the ACLU's own site provides relevant information about its biases that its own "About" section doesn't reveal.

The same series of steps with ProPublica show that it, too, claims to be a nonprofit, non-partisan reporting site, but moving away from the source reveals that it leans left, according to AllSides, another valuable site that evaluates bias ("About Us"; "ProPublica Media Bias Ranking"). At this point, you would want to take your bearings and move forward by locating sources that balance those liberal perspectives that are likely to value an individual's privacy over the freedoms of large companies and corporations. Further lateral reading of the sources cited in each article (by following embedded links or opening new tabs), as well as the citations in the other sources you locate will help you to see bias more clearly. Thus, taking bearings and using lateral reading strategies can reveal bias in all kinds of material, which is crucial to negotiating the credibility of sources and representing controversial issues in fair and balanced ways.

Recognizing Your Own Biases

It's not just sources that are biased. All of us are biased, and this can get in the way of effective reading and research habits. Some of our biases come from our backgrounds and experiences, plus what you learn at home and school. Each day we are exposed to large amounts of information that attempt to sway our views. When people get stuck in their own beliefs, and only seek out and believe evidence to support their views, the process is known as confirmation bias. Confirmation bias can be especially problematic when you are conducting research because it can get in the way of your valuing sources that offer different perspectives from your own. As dangerous as this practice is, it's fairly common, according to Stanford University psychologist Jennifer Eberhardt: "People tend to seek out and attend to information that already confirms their beliefs. We find such information more trustworthy and are less critical of it, even when we are presented with credible, seemingly unassailable facts that suggest otherwise" (33). Confirmation bias can result in choosing sources that confirm ideas or information you already know or believe, which can be counterproductive

whether you are writing a research essay, seeking information for health and safety reasons, or making a decision about which candidate to vote for.

Recognizing confirmation bias, though, is a first step toward mitigating it, as psychologist Raymond S. Nickerson of Tufts University points out: "Perhaps simply being aware of the confirmation bias—of its pervasiveness and of the many guises in which it appears—might help one both to be a little cautious about making up one's mind quickly on important issues and to be somewhat more open to opinions that differ from one's own than one might otherwise be" (211). In terms of critical reading this means that you should regularly monitor the perspectives in the sources you choose to ensure that you are not only relying on sources that always already confirm your ideas. Additionally, you should deliberately seek out sources that oppose your ideas so you have a more well-rounded understanding of the subject and offer a fair appraisal of a topic or issue.

Additional Tips that Draw on Lateral Reading

Reading laterally can help you assess the credibility of the information, including photographs and videos, you find online and help you read more deeply. To further support your lateral reading, we offer the following tips that draw on the lateral reading approach

Tip 1: Click on Hyperlinks

Research has shown that in many cases students don't take full advantage of what the Web has to offer (Rodrigue; Wineburg and McGrew; McGrew et al.; Purdy). Even though studies suggest that students prefer texts with hyperlinks, particularly when they are conducting research, they don't always click on them (Purdy; Vassileva and Chankova; Rodrigue). Does this characterize your way of reading online? Instead of clicking on hyperlinks embedded in news stories and other online texts students often simply read online texts as if they were print texts. Keep in mind that online texts are connected to other texts, and those texts are connected to others. Actively following hyperlinks can deepen your reading experience by directing you to primary sources, related sources, and texts that can provide additional context for what you are reading.

Tip 2: Open New Tabs

Just as you can deepen your reading experience by following hyperlinks you can do the same by opening new tabs to further explore your subject.

Not all online texts have hyperlinks embedded in them. As such, it may be up to you to take the initiative to seek out additional information. Like hyperlinks, opening new tabs can help you learn more about a subject, create some context for it, explore what others have said about it, and read up on relevant definitions or related ideas. The possibilities really are endless but only if you allow your curiosity to guide you.

Tip 3: Move Around the Web Deliberately

We have all had the experience of starting somewhere on the Web and then two hours later having no idea how we got to where we ended up. There's nothing inherently wrong with this, and you can stumble upon useful material inadvertently. But, when you are conducting research for an assignment or out of a personal interest, it's important to practice two behaviors that Wineburg and McGrew noticed the professional fact checkers engaging in: "taking bearings" and "click restraint." As noted above, taking bearings involves "charting a plan for moving forward," as do sailors, so that you are moving purposefully in a productive direction (Wineburg and McGrew 30). When you practice click restraint, you don't trust that the first results that a search engine like Google Scholar generates are necessarily the most relevant, but instead you spend time "scanning the search engine results page and reading the snippets before clicking on any link" to make an informed decision about where to go (Wineburg and McGrew 28). Both of these practices slow you down, which is the first step toward a deeper reading experience.

Final Thoughts

Some of the strategies presented in this chapter may be new to you while you may already be familiar with others. Enriching your online reading practices involves paying closer attention to how you already read online sources and how you currently judge their credibility. Once you reflect on your current practices you can then fill in any gaps with the strategies laid out in this chapter. New reading practices may seem cumbersome at first, but they will soon enough become second nature. Just remember not to let your guard down like Alice did!

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Teacher Resources for Effectively and Efficiently Reading the Credibility of Online Sources

We suggest that you use this chapter early in your term, or as soon as you have students doing any kind of research project. The sooner you can help students improve their critical reading skills, the better their overall work will be. There is ample research of several different kinds that indicates students' difficulties with reading and assessing the credibility of online material. This research includes careful studies of students' inability to evaluate online materials (Stanford History Education Group); qualitative evaluations of students' own writing that includes the use of sources (from the Citation Project); and standardized test data (from ACT and others). This chapter can help you support students as they develop their abilities in this area.

The central terms you will want to introduce are "critical reading," "misinformation," "disinformation," "primary vs. secondary sources," "bias," "confirmation bias," and "credibility." You may have discussed some of these already in class, but may want to present or review them in the context of the more general goal of critical reading online. Of these concepts, probably the most difficult to discuss is bias. We've tried to give readers a clear definition; even so, bias is hard to see, most notably when the sites we look at agree with our own ideas. The news sites (see activity #3 below) will provide the most obvious examples of bias, but they are not the only ones you might use. There is bias in science reporting (e.g., FoodBabe.com; mercola.com) and in plenty of other areas. Discussions of bias should focus carefully on the language that is used and on the "facts" that are presented. The lateral reading process we describe should help students apply critical reading strategies to help them recognize the bias in these sites and ultimately find quality information online.

Before you take students to the activities below and then on to their individual projects, it might be useful to look together at a hoax site or two. The following are two examples, but there are many online that are designated as such if you would prefer to choose your own:

1. Buy Dehydrated Water: https://buydehydratedwatercom.weebly.com/
2. The Taxonomy of Barney: https://www.improbable.com/airchives/paperair/volume1/v1i1/barney.htm

You might have students review these or other hoax sites by contrasting them with their own favorite sites or your school's site. Your goal in class discussion should be to raise students' awareness of ways in which information is presented online, whether true or false. These examples should help students see why it will be useful for them to have critical reading skills for their own work.

With this background, you can move directly to lateral reading as a strongly recommended approach to evaluating Web sources. Using the subject of an upcoming source-driven assignment as the focus, have students practice the steps of lateral reading as a class, in pairs, or in small groups to give them hands-on experience with this process as they explore sources on the assigned subject. Demonstrating the process and incorporating the additional tips we discuss (clicking hyperlinks, opening new tabs, and moving deliberately around the Web) will set students up to follow the lateral reading process. Students might also want to keep a sort of "lab notebook" of their Web searches with notes on the lateral reading steps they follow in their individual projects to be submitted with their final writing assignment.

Activities

The following are four class activities that can help students apply and practice what they learn in this chapter about assessing the credibility of online sources. The first activity asks students to draw on their prior knowledge, which helps lay the foundation for applying what may be new knowledge.

1. Reflect on your current reading practices as you are moving around the Web. Take notes on the following: How do you tend to move from one site to the next? Do you open new tabs? Follow hyperlinks? Do you move deliberately or haphazardly? What are you learning about yourself as a digital reader as you pay attention to your practices?

2. Access your institution's library and peruse its databases, paying attention to the titles of the databases and any additional information offered about each. Make a list of at least three databases that contain primary sources and at least three that contain secondary sources. How can you tell the difference based on the titles and any information offered about the databases?

3. On a day when there is a major story in the world news, look at the following different news sites to see how the story is reported and presented, likely on the front page (or landing page) in order to notice how bias plays out in reporting on major news events:

    - *Al Jazeera* ("US & Canada News")
    - *New York Times*
    - *The Washington Post*
    - *BBC News*
    - *CBC News*
    - *The Jerusalem Post* ("World News")

    What do you notice about how the story is represented? Where do you see bias? How do you know? Social media sites can also give you a version of the news; evaluate what you see on your favorite site, comparing and contrasting it to what is on the news sites above.

4. Following the steps laid out in this chapter, read laterally about the Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division in order to evaluate whether it is a credible scientific source about dihydrogen monoxide ("Dihydrogen Monoxide – DHMO Homepage"). Share and compare your notes and your evaluation with those of your classmates. What's the consensus?

4 Writing with Your Peers

Raquel Corona, Kami Day, and Michele Eodice

Overview

This chapter advocates for student writers to collaborate and coauthor.* When opportunities to write together are offered—as part of in-class or outside-class writing assignments—students can benefit in a number of ways, including learning how audiences are addressed and how immediate feedback can become a dynamic element of writing together. In terms of the value of the experience, collaborative writing and coauthoring are technologically supported and often expected in many professional workplaces.

> *It was a good learning experience for me when my group members took their turns writing and ended up contributing things that I never would have thought of to the paper. All in all, I'd say that it was a positive experience, and a good assignment. Because writing in a group forces everyone to grow in some area that they are not good at. It's a different area for different people but everyone grows somehow.*
>
> —First-Year Composition Student

Perhaps you would describe your experiences with collaborative work differently than Noah does. When we ask college students about their encounters with teamwork, group work, collaboration, cooperative learning, coauthoring, or cowriting, many students tell us those experiences were not very positive, especially in high school. They complain that, for example, the bulk of the work usually fell on one person, that slackers got credit for work they didn't do, that one person dominated the group, that some group members did not communicate well with the rest

of the group, that some members did not contribute much or did not contribute at all, that the finished product did not meet their standards. They may have felt their own grade was adversely affected by the grade their group's work received. Some of you are probably nodding your heads as you read this list, but we can say with confidence that most of the students in our classes report positive experiences with collaborative work, including writing together. We are three experienced writing teachers who believe collaboration sometimes goes sour because students are asked to work together without first understanding the value of such work, or because they have not yet learned how to work together productively. Some have collaborated successfully in a group yet have never actually written with another person. But we have seen that when students understand writing together can deepen their learning and help them become better writers, and when they are shown how coauthoring works, they are more willing to set aside their skepticism and engage with their peers. Our goal is to get you thinking about the benefits of collaborating, and, more specifically, the benefits of writing with your peers.

It might surprise you to know that even though you feel you write better in solitude, you seldom actually write alone; writers, students, and professionals rarely do. Even the student in the dorm room in the middle of the night has access to the knowledge and experience of other writers through Internet searches, library databases, writing center tutors, other students who are also up in the middle of the night trying to finish an essay, and their own experience of reading the work of many authors. Two graduate students acknowledged this when they wrote (together), "We find solace, support, and success when we look outside ourselves, borrow ideas, remix other texts, talk to others, and collaborate with their thoughts. The Lone Genius author doesn't exist. And it never did" (Edwards and Paz 66).

We three coauthors believe all writing is collaborative in some way. The difference in a classroom situation is that you have what two scholars and coauthors in the field of writing studies, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, call an "addressed audience," or an immediate, rather than imagined, audience. That means you instantly have other people to give you feedback along the way, to add information and perspectives, to correct your mistakes, to push you to think hard, and to remind you that someone other than you will need to understand what you write. Yes, writing with peers can be fun and you can make friends and enjoy the experience, but mainly, writing with your peers offers a whole new way to approach your assignments and allows your thinking to become shaped by additional voices.

Our Own Experiences Writing with Others and in Our Classrooms

We're not sure what comes to mind when you think of the term *cowriting* or *coauthoring*. You might think of it in a broad sense—writing together or writing collaboratively. Of course, that kind of collaboration might take any number of forms, but the form we're talking about here is in-person, in close proximity or online, real-time writing together—in other words, a scenario in which writers sit down together and create text together. We three are writing teachers who ask our students to do this kind of coauthoring every semester, but before they dive into that first coauthoring task, or perhaps test the waters tentatively, we spend some time sharing what we know about the value of coauthoring, including some stories about our own experience.

Neither Kami or Michele remembers coauthoring in high school or even as undergraduates, so their first coauthoring endeavors came in graduate school. The workload was heavy and the subject matter challenging, but the professors encouraged collaborative work, so they wrote with each other and with other graduate students. Working this way allowed them to divide up some of the research tasks; but while working side by side, they also found they could tackle complicated concepts and generate even more ideas than they would have writing alone. Because of all the talking they did while writing, they were constantly testing their understanding with another person, and that helped them learn better and faster. They quickly discovered that what they produce together is always better than what they can produce individually because they were able to combine knowledge, life experiences, writing styles, and vocabularies. One of them is skilled at creating vivid metaphors, one is adept at organization and transitions, one is spontaneous, one is a taskmaster, and for editing, they have double the assets to make sure grammar and usage is appropriate for their audience and for the task at hand.

Kami, an introvert, had always preferred to work alone, so she understands the misgivings some students might have about writing collaboratively. But because of her graduate school experience, she learned how her own work could be enriched by the ideas and perspectives of others, and she encourages any reluctant students to be open to the possible rewards of writing with their peers. Most of her students are willing to try, and most, like Noah, have a positive experience with coauthoring during the semester. They find themselves in what Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development." In that zone, peers learn from each

other, bringing together their individual knowledges and experiences to create a deep pool of ideas, expertise, and possibilities.

Raquel did write with others in her undergraduate years, but this writing was often outside the classroom with her sorority sisters. Some of it was personal, but often it was for sorority and organizational business purposes. During that time, it became natural for Raquel to cowrite with others. However, even in this context, she often took the lead or was particular about how the writing came to be. It wasn't until she went to graduate school and cowrote with others that it felt truly like a collaborative endeavor.

Now that she is a composition instructor, one of Raquel's goals in asking her students to coauthor is that her students learn to write as members of an ability-diverse team to experience community problem solving. She acknowledges that group writing tasks do not always turn out "successfully" if "successful writing" is defined as it has been traditionally. Her students' collaborative writing is often all over the place; sometimes one person takes over the writing while others contribute, or they really struggle with coming up with a cohesive written response. However, she keeps asking students to write together because she thinks the students' discussions as they share their different views are so important, and such discussion really helps build community. Students are also able to find others in the course they can be supported by or people they will choose to work with when they have to self-select for other group activities.

Students Writing Together

Here, we offer a snapshot of what a face-to-face, in-person coauthoring interaction might look like and sound like. Imagine a scenario at a midwestern community college in which students are coauthoring. One group of four has chosen to write about a proposed change in the school's nondiscrimination policy, a revision that would add *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* to the policy. The group is diverse: one member is a straight, nontraditional student (a student who has come back to school at an age that is not typical for new students) whose age and experience have exposed her to many different views; one identifies as queer and has experienced harassment and discrimination on campus; one straight male identifies as a Christian with rather conservative views; one male identifies as straight and liberal. Their majors range from elementary education to business to English to chemistry, their writing abilities from fluent and confident to tentative and inexperienced, their ages from eighteen to thirty-five. Two

students identify as Black, one as white, and one as mixed race. It would be possible to fill several pages with all their differences. You can probably imagine the challenges this project would present, and because their views and perspectives differ, the group, after a great deal of discussion (coauthoring involves a lot of talk), decides to write an essay that explores these different views rather than takes one specific position. In this way, everyone's perspective is voiced but also challenged.

The following exchange captures part of the group's process; a few minutes of a final editing session might go like this:

> Student 1: Okay, so the next section starts with "This change in the policy may cause trouble. There might be heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."
>
> Student 2: That doesn't sound right . . . kind of choppy. How about a colon after "trouble"?
>
> Student 3: What's a colon supposed to do? I've never really understood that.
>
> Student 2: Well . . . it usually comes before a list, but it can add more about the first part of the sentence too.
>
> Student 4: What about one of those lines . . . a dash . . . after "trouble."
>
> Student 2: Why?
>
> Student 4: Well, a dash can be used like a colon but it sort of sets off . . . emphasizes something more than a colon does.
>
> Student 1: Okay, so if we put in a dash it looks like this (typing) . . . "This change in the policy may cause trouble—there might be heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."
>
> Student 3: Yeah, I like that better, but what if we take out "there might be"?
>
> Student 1: Okay, if we do that it looks like this (deleting) . . . "This change in the policy may cause trouble—heated debates, demonstrations, and even violence."

All four students: Yeah—that sounds good! (high fives all around)

You might be thinking "Oh, that wouldn't happen—too corny." But we have seen and heard many such exchanges, including in-person and virtual high fives.

These students are not working in an ideal coauthoring situation—no classroom ever is. Ideally, students who already know each other well would choose to write together, but in a classroom, even if you have gotten to know a few students, you usually do not know anyone very well and

you are often assigned to groups. So, how do you participate in a group to help everyone work successfully together? You might find yourself in a class where groups are assigned, or you might be told to put yourselves into groups with little preliminary preparation. We encourage you to take some time to get to know each other. Of course, you can introduce yourselves, but we also ask students in a new group to come up with a list of things they have in common beyond the obvious (we are all mammals, enrolled in the same class, etc.). What usually ensues is a lively conversation, a relaxing of tensions, and the beginnings of a productive group. Even if your instructor did not ask you to participate in such an exercise, you could do it on your own. Sometimes we make random pairs and have students interview each other with questions that get beyond where they are from. One question that works to move the conversation toward writing is: How would you describe your relationship to writing? The answers here are often metaphorical and revealing, such as: My relationship with writing is long distance!

Group writing can also help you gain experience as a facilitator and as someone who can take on different roles and responsibilities. Some groups assign roles like scribe (takes notes or types), sheepherder (keeps the group on track), whiner (to get problems out in the open so the group can move on, or to take questions to the teacher), the spokesperson (if the group is asked to report), and so forth. The members of some groups just naturally fall into taking on roles as they need to (actually, this happens most of the time in our classes). Sometimes one voice is heard more than the others, but we have experienced very few problems with domineering students or students who say nothing. In many cases, highly verbal extroverted students seem to understand they are instrumental in drawing quieter or less confident students out, and students who would never say a word in a large class discussion are more willing to participate in a less threatening small group whose members they trust and feel somewhat comfortable with. Students have told us they learn more about themselves through the co-authoring experience; they realize their strengths and gain self-awareness of the ways they can contribute to collaborative work, sometimes as idea generators, sometimes as editors, sometimes as taskmasters, and sometimes as the person who keeps the group laughing.

Ideally, you will be given time in class to coauthor. But you might be required to do your coauthoring outside class. In either case, we recommend the role of scribe is rotated with each session—it can be a powerful position to hold the pen or control the keyboard. When we first had computers in our classrooms (1990s!), groups gathered around one monitor and the

scribe was on the keyboard. In current classrooms, it is more likely you will have your own device, laptop, or tablet, or there is a projection screen for the computer. The kinds of tools now available to share screens and documents (like Google Docs), whether students are in a classroom together or meeting virtually, allow the process of writing together to be more visible and accessible for all writers to participate (Hewett and Robidoux).

The questions below can be used in the group as icebreakers but we place them here to give you a chance to reflect on your thinking about co-authoring so far.

1. Would your friends characterize you as someone who works and plays well with others? Why or why not?

2. Write the recipe for your successful individual composing process. For example, does it include six cups of time and a teaspoon of inspiration? Then develop a recipe for a successful coauthoring process for a four-person group.

3. Describe how a piece of writing might be enriched by having more readers and writers involved. It might help your thinking process to imagine you are starting to write a research essay. What is the question you want to ask?

Final Thoughts: Beyond Classroom Writing

Our purpose in writing this chapter was to help you feel more open and comfortable with the possibilities of writing with your peers. Writing together can impact your learning and engagement in a class but also prepare you for future opportunities, beyond your undergraduate experience, to write with others.

From the students in our classes over the years, we have heard just how much writing and coauthoring takes place outside of class, especially within clubs and organizations, student government, activist groups, and athletic events. All of our interactions with people, whether close friends or strangers in public life, require the ability to negotiate and compromise and *writing* with others can help you develop and practice ways of *listening* and *learning* with others. In some workplaces, team writing is the way all the work is done and there are many guides to doing team writing (an example is *Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups* by Joanna Wolfe, who researches collaborative writing in technical communication). Pattie Wojahn, Kristin Blicharz, and Stephanie Taylor, who write about virtual

collaboration, point out that because workplaces expect and support virtual collaborative writing, an understanding of the "care, coordination, and cooperation" that must go into coauthoring will be an asset (66). In addition, engaging with writers through writing projects has the potential to make the work more meaningful (Bleakney 2020).

To gain more experience, it might even be possible for you and a group of your peers to propose a coauthored project for this or another class, or to establish "interest groups" of students who are working on similar projects so you can share research, insights, and even do some blog writing or *Wikipedia* editing together (Lockett). We hope that by the time you enter the workplace, you will have had experiences working well and writing authentically with other people. Twenty-first century learners like you have access to amazing technologies, access to other writers around the world, and access to multiple literacies and modes of communication. All of these support collaboration and coauthoring—in school and beyond.

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Teacher Resources for Writing with Your Peers

This chapter is designed to encourage students to consider the benefits of collaborative writing and coauthoring. But it is important the instructor also have a positive disposition toward such work. At some point in your teaching career, you might have asked your students to coauthor, felt the experience was negative or not useful for your students and for you, and decided student coauthoring would not be part of your pedagogy. We hope this chapter will make you hopeful about trying again. There is plenty of research in writing studies about authorship and collaborative writing, but for a useful discussion of how to prepare students to write together and facilitating the process, we suggest the chapter "Learning from Coauthoring: Composing Texts Together in the Composition Classroom" (Eodice and Day) in the collection *Teaching with Student Texts*.

It also might be useful, as you form student writing groups, to think about what your own experiences with collaborative writing and coauthoring have been or whether you have always avoided that type of interaction or have never had the opportunity to try it. We also encourage you to try experimenting with low-stakes collaborative writing exercises in your classroom if you are not yet ready to dedicate a whole assignment in your course to this endeavor. We know sometimes as educators we need the opportunity to start small before fully committing to a new assignment.

The following prompts are designed for you to uncover your own disposition toward coauthoring. Your answers might uncover views of coauthoring that could impact the way you present collaborative activities and coauthoring in your course. We also think the prompts could be offered to students as well.

Reflection Questions:

4. Did you have a particular feeling or opinion about collaborative writing and coauthoring before reading the chapter? Has that feeling or opinion changed?

5. When you imagine yourself in a writing group, what role do you see yourself playing? What strength can you contribute?

6. What is your biggest concern about working with others on a coauthored paper?

7. Some writers and researchers view all writing as problem solving; how do you see yourself solving problems with others in the group?

Sample Writing Tasks

Below, we provide writing activities, assignments, and guidelines we use in our individual classes. You could ask students to experiment with the first set of collaborative low-stakes writing exercises prior to engaging in the longer assignment. However, you could also just experiment with one or two of these exercises to see how students respond to help you prepare for eventually implementing the essay assignment. After these writing exercises, we provide an essay assignment and guidelines students can use to help them manage conflict. Feel free to use any of these activities and templates and adapt them in any way that makes sense for your context. Finally, we include a list of touchstones that have guided our teaching and our students' interactions with each other.

Note on Group Formation

Some instructors assign students to permanent groups about three weeks into a semester after the whole class has had a chance to become more comfortable with each other. In this way, students have had a few weeks' practice working with each other in small groups that change membership, and the teacher has had a chance to see which students are introverts or extroverts, who comes to class regularly, and so forth. Other instructors prefer to allow students to self-select, others form groups randomly, others ask the students to count off and form groups of all ones, all twos, etc. Each method has advantages, but what matters ultimately is creating a classroom in which students understand the value of collaborative learning, feel that the work they do is meaningful, and acknowledge their responsibility to each other.

Low-Stakes Collaborative Writing Exercises

Put students in small groups of three to four individuals. Provide them with a writing prompt to a reading they completed for homework (or one they read together in class). Ask them to respond in writing as an entire group. Usually, based on context, we provide students more step-by-step instructions on how this works so they understand the various steps this exercise requires of them. For instance, we have provided students the following order of instructions:

- Take some time together to verbally discuss your answers to the prompt.
- Make sure everyone has had a chance to share their thoughts.
- Afterwards, try to determine which ideas you may want to communicate in your written response. You may not be able to discuss everyone's ideas, so which one(s) is the larger group interested in?
- Then, begin the writing process.

If computers are available, encourage everyone to use Google Docs to start writing together, or if it is done by hand, encourage the group to come up with certain roles. Remember to make it clear to students that they are to work together to submit one written response. You should indicate how long you want that response to be and what kind of content you would like to receive (do you want them to present evidence or quotes from the reading?).

You can provide students a writing prompt based on an issue they may be acquainted with and have them argue or share a perspective on it. This could be a topic they choose amongst themselves, too. As mentioned above, you may want to break down the list of activities they must go through in order to create a fully formulated written response.

Process Guidelines for an Essay

Essay 1

> Your group has had several opportunities this semester to coauthor, or create short pieces of writing together, and now it's time for the text you write as groups. Some of you might be groaning about this, but in the past, my students have found this to be a mostly positive experience. They learn from each other about the topic and about writing, they enjoy the support from each other, and sometimes they even have fun! I believe it's some of the most important work you do since it has so much to do with the relationships in the group and how you value each other and fulfill your responsibilities to your peers. So here are some guidelines to help you with this process.
>
> *Schedule:* You'll write most of this text in class. If you like, you can exchange your drafts with another group for feedback and work on revisions. In addition to working together in class, you might

want to work on the document virtually in a shared-document platform like Google Docs.

Contents of the paper: Your essay can include some research, but that is not a requirement. Remember, coauthoring can be challenging since you might not all agree totally on the topic. That's okay—consensus on everything is not necessary. You'll need to find a way, though, to create a new voice from all your voices so the essay fits together smoothly and does not sound as though it is written by several different people. You may have to weave together different views, but no one's voice need be silenced. Cognitive conflict is a good thing, and we could all use more practice negotiating diverse views and respecting each other's positions.

In-class work: You'll have four full class periods to work on this project. If you have research to do, you *must* do it outside class time and bring it to class with you. Class time will be for writing. At the end of each writing period, I'll take up what you have written so it will be sure to make it to class the next time (or you'll send me an electronic copy if you're working on a computer). If you need to take a hard copy with you, I'll make copies for you. We'll decide as a class whether you want to spend some writing time in the computer lab.

The process: Remember the guidelines we came up with at the beginning of the semester for working together. Please take turns as you discuss your work, make room respectfully for all views, think of the value of hearing each other rather than making someone agree with you. *Just do what you've been doing already this semester!* Please take turns scribing, and *don't write the whole paper by writing individual sections and smooshing them together.* Most of the text should be written by the whole group—you've had practice doing this and you've done it well.

The product: This is one of the major projects of the semester, so please take it seriously—I do. It's a chance for you to review what you've learned and practiced this semester: writing together, invention strategies, unified paragraphing, sentence variety, perhaps integrating research sources, using MLA format, editing for nonessential words, spelling and punctuation, transitions, etc. The text should be *well edited,* and if you use any outside sources, it should include a *Works Cited* page. These essays are typically

not long—writing together is hard! —but they are rich in that they bring together so many styles and ideas. I will be circulating among your groups as you write and assisting if I need to, but I expect each group to develop its own process.

Reflections on Coauthoring

All the students are asked to write reflections on their required coauthoring experiences, but when students are given the choice to coauthor (as they are with their research projects), which means they will be working together outside of class, the students who choose coauthoring are asked to turn in reflections on that process. Below is the reflection assignment.

If You Coauthor

In my experience, coauthors find the best way, without any help from me, to work together successfully. My main concerns are that you contribute equally to the project, that all your voices are heard in the text as a voice you create together, that you appreciate each other's strengths and learn from each other, and that you have a positive and productive experience. I'm as interested in your process as in the text you produce, so I'm going to ask you to write some individual (each person will write their own) reflections on that process. I hope you'll be honest about your experience and your roles, and that you'll describe your experience in detail.

Reflection guidelines: Choose from the prompts below to develop a reflection about your coauthoring experience.

1. Why did you decide to coauthor the essay?
2. How did you all do the research together?
3. How did you do the writing of the essay so far? (Did you each write sections and put them together? Did you sit down together and write each sentence together? Did you do a combination of the two or some other combination I have not thought of?)
4. What do you think you contributed to the essay? (your strengths)
5. What do you think your coauthors contributed? (their strengths)
6. How did you feel about any feedback you got from peers?
7. How did you make the revisions?

8. How do you feel about the quality of the essay?
9. How do you feel about the whole process?
10. What have you learned from the other coauthor(s) about writing, research, or anything else?
11. What have you learned in the coauthoring process about writing, working with another person?
12. Has anything about this whole experience surprised you?

Conflict

Navigating Conflict

Writing with others is not just about stringing words together with a few people you hardly know. Sometimes the writing part is the easy part. Getting to know, respect, and value others is important—but conflicts will arise. Check your privilege and be sure you are listening to all voices. You might not agree with everyone, you might bring bias or impatience with others, but the goal is to learn and write as a member of an ability-diverse team to experience community problem solving.

In life as in the classroom, you should expect to encounter some conflict. This is inevitable as we work with others and especially when we have to write together. Writing is something many of us feel is personal and belongs to us. You have to acknowledge this is because you actually care! However, when we write with others, we must begin to break away from this idea. Your writing is a contribution to a group or a team, and it helps all of you meet a goal, but that does not mean it will not be questioned or bettered by others. This is what makes cowriting so rewarding (as we have said several times already).

But the reality is, you won't always find it so rewarding—you may encounter some difficulties in working with others. Some of these difficulties may include that you have a different idea or set of values surrounding the writing prompt and what it's asking you to do. Simply said, you may have a different answer to the prompt than your cowriter(s). You may find in your group that a few of you have different ideas about the kind of writing you want to

write or even the words used. Yes, it can be that small! Sometimes it can be as complex as not knowing how to move forward with so many different ideas or if the writing is sounding like a cohesive piece. You may also encounter a situation where you feel as though some people are not contributing or doing as much as others. We ask that you be patient with yourself, others, and the writing process. Working in groups is not easy even when writing is not required, so you can expect this process to be a challenge. However, we believe it is in the midst of these struggles that you will have the opportunity to learn more about yourself and the writing process. Although it may sound too simple to say "be patient," the reality is, it has to be that simple. Being patient to us means the following:

- Stop after engaging for a while in a particularly difficult conversation about a difference in opinion or ideas or thoughts. So, yes, engage in some meaningful conversation with your writing partner(s) and then maybe take a day to think on what was exchanged or even just a few minutes before deciding how you're all going to move forward. Maybe take a moment and process the conversation via some reflective writing or with a trusted friend or family member who you know can give you their perspective as well.
- Be open to others' ideas and approach to writing. The beauty of working with others is that we have access to a wider range of language and knowledge—don't take it for granted!
- Build a thick skin and do not take offense too much. Someone is in class just like you, trying to do the best they can, so take their suggestions to heart; see how they can help make your thinking and writing better, just as yours makes theirs better. Be able to accept feedback on your writing and do not be afraid to "touch" each other's words and writing! This is where the true collaborative nature of writing together happens—when you work and meld your efforts on the page! Use the "suggesting" or "tracking" feature on Google/Word to make changes so everyone is aware of what is being recommended and get in there! Remember, the writing process is not linear—it's messy!
- Finally, being patient also involves being willing to learn more about yourself and who you are as a writer and a person. Your professor may ask you at the end of your collaborative writing project to reflect on your experience working with others. We

encourage you to keep this in mind as you work with others. Who are you in a group? We mentioned briefly that there are usually roles in a group. So, which one do you usually take on? Are you the one who reminds the group of the amount of time left on the project? The requirements associated with the project? Do you usually try to motivate others? Do you take the lead and get the writing started? Or do you like to wait and see what others have contributed and then move into writing and help others develop what is on the page? The answers to these questions are really for you to get a better understanding of who you are as you continue to engage in groups and write or work collaboratively with others in the workforce or even in student organizations while you're still in college.

Creating a Class Ethos with Touchstones

It is important to define the space in which learning together will take place, and one way to do that is to introduce guidelines like the Touchstones below early in the semester (these are based on the work of Parker Palmer and are adapted from the list of Touchstones on the Center for Courage and Renewal's website, http://www.couragerenewal.org/touchstones/). The class can read this list together, and students too can be invited to choose a Touchstone that seems particularly challenging and share their thoughts with the class if they feel comfortable doing that (many do). Of course, it's important to revisit these Touchstones often during the semester.

Classroom Community Touchstones

Ideas that increase the likelihood of our working together productively

1. *Extend welcome and accept welcome.* We all learn most effectively in spaces that welcome us. Therefore, we have a responsibility to welcome each other to this place and the work of this course and to presume that we are being welcomed as well.
2. *Be here.* Be as present as possible. Set aside, as much as you can, the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Bring all of yourself to our class; allow yourself to "be here now."

3. *Listen*. Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feeling beneath the words. Listen to yourself as well as others. Strive to achieve a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking and acting.
4. *Be open to share*. You will be invited to share in small groups and the large group. You will determine the extent to which you want to share or disclose information about yourself. There are levels of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure requires risk. You will decide how much you wish to reveal.
5. *Suspend judgment*. Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgements and reactions we can listen to each other, and to ourselves, more fully.
6. *Identify assumptions*. Our assumptions are usually transparent to us, yet they show our worldview. By identifying our assumptions, we can then set them aside and open our viewpoints to greater possibilities.
7. *Speak your truth*. You are invited to say what is in your mind and heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. Your truth may be different from, even the opposite of, what another person in the class has said. Avoid introducing defensive feelings that distract from the dialogue; speaking your truth and arguing for what you believe is true (or to change someone else's truth) are two different things.
8. *Respect silence*. Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. This applies to the speaker as well—be comfortable leaving your words to resound in the silence, without refining or elaborating on what you have just said. This process allows others time to fully listen before reflecting on their own reactions.
9. *Be generous and kind*. We are all learning and it's important that we are patient with each other.
10. *When things get difficult, turn to wonder.* If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, or shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder: "I wonder what brought them to this place?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me?" "I wonder what they're feeling right now?"

5 Technologies of Trust: Creating Networks of Goodwill for Collaboration

Lance Cummings, Becka Jackson, and Moriah Yancey

Overview

Most students dread that fateful "group project," often for good reasons. Our past experiences with group work sometimes don't speak well to this kind of project.* But most writing in the 21st century is deeply collaborative and happens mostly in digital spaces. Observing the writing process in the professional world can give us new ways of looking at the collaborative writing process. In the end, good writing is built on trust—trust in people and trust in systems put in place to help you communicate. This chapter reviews new collaborative technologies used to manage writing projects in the professional world, gives examples of trust at work in a thriving software company, and discusses how to transfer these strategies to university writing projects.

Okay, we get it. You hate group projects. We're sure you've heard teachers say, "Group work is inevitable." But have you considered why you hate group work so much? Is it because you hate people? Yeah, people can be difficult to work with, but that seems a little harsh. When asked, students often talk about the following:

- Unfair distribution of work or award
- Difficulty organizing effective meetings
- The panicked last-minute push to get things done
- Not knowing the status of the project

So, maybe it's not that you hate people, but the way you've worked in groups before has been stressful.

In the end, good writing is built on trust—trust in the people and the systems put in place to help you. Think about it. Even language itself is built on trust. You trust language can be understood by other people. You must trust that the technology you use works. When you press send on that email, how do you know that person will receive it? You trust the system. You trust that email will show up in the right place…and that people check their email.

When collaborating, we often don't trust the people around us. We don't trust the systems we have in place to manage the work. Good collaboration, then, is about building trust and keeping communication channels open. In today's world, this means using technology and tools to make this process more efficient and less complicated. Good writers must learn strategies for building confidence in each other and the writing process. Any group project that you do in school is an opportunity for you to explore these safely. Yes, if your system fails, you might get a bad grade, but you are not going to lose your job.

In this article, we are going to think of your student group as an organization by looking at the strategies tech industries use to get things. Quite simply, an *organization* is a group of people with a common purpose and commonly held goals (Debs 162). Think of your little group as a small organization. Using specific project management tools, technologies, and strategies is key to creating goodwill in even the smallest organization or group.

Distributed Workflows in the 21st Century Workplace

We often think of the classroom as preparation for our future workplaces. However, the workplace can also inform our classroom experience. In today's workplace, writing and creative projects are developed in what we call a *distributed workflow*, where decision-making is shared across organizational roles and tasks are distributed across networks in order to encourage innovation and adaption in a quickly changing world (Hemp, 2008). In other words, managers or CEOs who try to make all the decisions or control the workflow stifle innovation. In school, teachers often tell you what to write and organize the schedule and tasks for you, but this can produce less creative or innovative projects. Managers in a distributed workflow are not likely to do this for you. Each team or group of employees is responsible for their own process. At the same time, most of these writing projects succeed or fail based on how the community of collaborators works.

To better understand how professional writers build goodwill, two of us, Becka and Moriah, will share our experiences as technical writers for product teams at nCino, a global software company headquartered in Wilmington, NC. Moriah joined nCino in October 2018, and her engineering team develops features that enhance retail and small business banking. Becka joined nCino in June 2019, and her engineering team develops features that power machine learning and automation. Understanding how workplaces adapt writing can help you see collaborative writing in new ways.

nCino is a cloud-based software company that builds an innovative Bank Operating System. Understanding this software isn't as important as understanding how the writing process has changed. In most writing classes, your project will be organized in what's called the *waterfall method*, which should look very familiar to you:

Brainstorming → Research → Rough draft → Feedback → Revision → Final Project

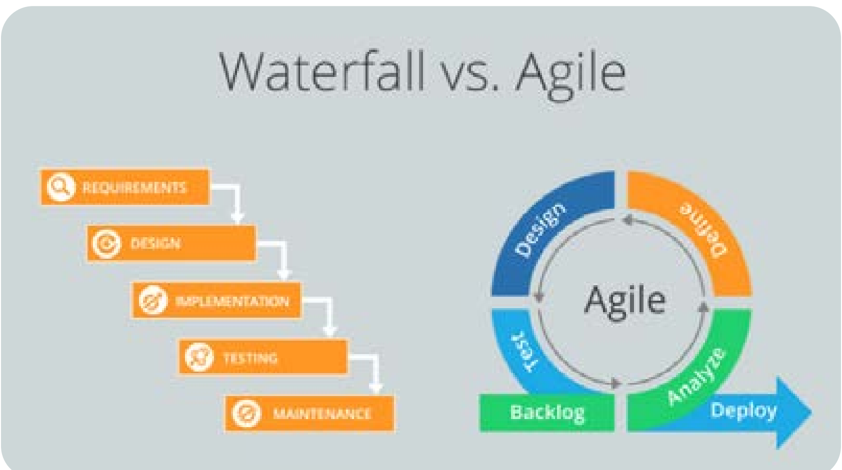


Figure 1. Waterfall vs. Agile. Image shows the two design methods and their steps."Waterfall_Vs_Agile" via Wikimedia Commons is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

The waterfall system can't always be trusted, especially for collaborative work. As your projects get larger and more complex, this idea of a draft becomes more intimidating.

"Okay, everyone we need a draft by such and such day and time. See you then." But when the day arrives, somebody hasn't done their work. Somebody else ran into a challenge that they couldn't solve on their own.

And another person decided they would just write the whole thing. Things are a mess.

This problem is compounded in technology companies. To write instructions for software, like Microsoft Word or nCino's Bank Operating System, where does one start? Even when a draft is completed, the software is always changing. These texts are never finished. You might document an entire app only to find out that the product team needs a different instructional document, requiring you to start over. Becka describes what this is like for writers:

> The workflow for technical writing is different than what we were taught in academic writing. There is no syllabus or rubric that we can reference. Technical writers are responsible for determining how to write and what to write, and essentially act as their own project managers. However, everyone on the team is responsible for the success of the whole project, from the code to the documentation.

To solve this problem, a group of software developers created what's called "agile project management" (Beck, et al.). The core element of *agile processes* is adaptability and constant communication. Moriah illustrates the importance of this new way of understanding writing projects with her experience as a technical writer:

> Every release, the technical writers follow an agile process to write release documentation. Although nCino strives to create new, innovative features, they also endeavor to improve their existing products. When we create new documentation for every release, we also edit current articles to provide information about new functions of existing features. While we are working on creating new documentation, either from scratch or from existing articles, we are also answering document comments that come from the last release's articles.

Though writing instructors will emphasize that writing is recursive—or a process that goes back and forth between stages—writing content in the 21st century rarely reflects the linear process we have in our minds from classroom experience.

Techniques for Managing Collaborative Projects with Agile Processes

Though your writing project is probably not as complex as Moriah's, and you definitely have an end date (when it will finally be graded), the same

techniques used to manage this complexity in the workplace can help manage your collaborative projects. Each of the main principles of agile can be applied to your writing project in the classroom.

1. Focus on Teams and Interaction: We are not obsessed with a particular process or particular tool. When we organize a team and a project, we focus on what kind of interaction will help this specific group of people get the job done, then what kinds of tools and processes will help that interaction happen. You might decide that everyone will write their own section of the draft. Using Google Docs is a good tool for this. Or if no one really likes checking their email, you might decide to use GroupMe instead, for daily communication.

2. Strive for Testable Drafts Instead of Perfection: Getting something on paper, no matter how small or imperfect, so that we can test it with our stakeholders is our priority. In class, you might test out an argumentative point by just writing a few paragraphs with the research that you've found and show it to your instructor to see if you are on the right track.

3. Foster Audience Dialogue: Check in with your audience to align expectations and intentions. For example, if you are writing a paper to persuade students to vote, you could take a testable draft to a group of students to see whether your persuasive methods and assumptions seem to have an impact.

4. Respond to Change Rather than Follow a Plan: When new information or input about your project comes in, be adaptable. There is no point in detailing a plan if you don't know what those details are before you've started the project. For example, you thought you were writing a paper persuading students to vote. Turns out what students really need is a how-to guide. Good thing you took a testable draft to open a dialogue with your audience!

Being flexible allows you to adapt, which in turn helps your group avoid pitfalls common with the waterfall drafting method.

So your instructor is going to give you some deadlines. If you are lucky, they might even give you some activities to help you along the way. But don't trust that system as the only framework you need. As a group, you need to build your own system. This means building processes, using tools

on the backend that work with your goals, and taking collective responsibility for your project.

Creating an Environment of Trust

When assigned a group project, feeling negativity or distrust toward group members because of past experiences is normal. To put collaboration strategies into practice, you'll need to set aside this initial reaction. Your group dynamic plays a huge role in the success of your project.

Consider the relationship between a workplace and its employees. According to Moriah and Becka, nCino credits their success to their company's inclusive, hard-working culture. The company's core values empower employees to bring their authentic selves to work. nCino values each employee and enforces the idea that no one position is greater than the other because teamwork is what brings a great product to market—a key element of a distributed workflow. According to Moriah, this requires a great deal of trust all around:

> There's a lot of trust at nCino. No one is micro-managing you, ever. That can be both daunting and exhilarating to people who have always had structure or someone checking behind everything that they do. nCino wants to create an environment where everyone is empowered to do their best work.

Try thinking about your own team in this way. You are not trying to make everyone do things; you are trying to create an environment of goodwill where everyone wants to help each other out.

When collaborating on large projects, maintaining this goodwill requires constant communication. James Porter, a scholar who studies how people communicate in networks, calls this *phatic communication* or the skill "of creating effective communication channels, keeping them open, and establishing ongoing and fruitful relationships" (174). Under this lens, writing and communication becomes less about transmitting information or persuading people and more about building relationships through "good will, trust, cooperation, partnership, and harmony" (175). The whole point of communication is to interact and build connections with others. This fundamentally changes how we think about writing:

- A political essay is about building better connections with people of other persuasions that we need to make political change.

- A business proposal is about creating goodwill between an entrepreneur and an investor or bank.
- A business tweet is about maintaining connections with customers.
- A scholarly article is about keeping channels of communication open between people researching similar things.

In Ancient Greece, accomplishing any of these meant that communicators needed to be good people—what they called *ethos*. You might look at group work as a character-building experience. You are not just "getting something done," you are learning to build and maintain productive relationships.

Cultivating Your Group Culture

The first step of establishing ongoing fruitful relationships is to make sure everyone is on the same page. This is why most organizations have a clear mission statement, such as the following from nCino: "To transform the financial services industry through innovation, reputation and speed" ("Culture and Careers"). Every employee knows their goal is to help nCino create innovative banking software fast. Note, though, the importance of "ethos". nCino doesn't just want to get things done, they want to build a reputation that creates a tight community with banks and their customers. Sometimes organizations even explicitly state what kind of culture or community they want to maintain.



Figure 2. nCino Cultural Code showing six core values: "Bring You're A-game," "Do the Right Thing," "Respect Each Other," "Make Someone's Day," "Have Fun," and "Be a Winner!". Screen shot from nCino.com and used with permission.

Check out nCino's cultural code in figure 2. Note that only two of their core values are about getting things done. The rest are about building and maintaining strong relationships. In your own group, think about what kind of "culture" you want to create for this project. Is your goal simply to get an A or just to pass reasonably well? If not everyone is interested in an A, then not everyone is going to put in the same effort. It might help to think outside the classroom. How might your project impact the community, the university, or students? Or is there something specific that you want to learn?

As a group, write out your purpose statement. Sometimes it is helpful to even create a team charter that lays out the rules of behavior—much like nCino's core cultural values. Once that's done, your "organization" can work on building a system that everyone can trust to get things done in a way that matches these guiding statements.

Building a Trustworthy Project Management System

Since your project management needs will vary from those of software developers, you don't necessarily need to use all the elements of an agile process. In fact, the advantage of this system is its adaptability. That said, the key elements are useful for almost any project:

1. Limit the scope
2. Prioritize your tasks
3. Create opportunity for multiple iterations
4. Keep communication channels open

If you try to keep all the tasks and processes in your head, you will not only create more stress for yourself, but also more opportunities for your collaboration to fall apart. If you can rely on your system, then you don't need to fret and worry about the project when you are working on it or meeting as a group.

1. Limit the Scope

A trustworthy system always keeps the scope manageable. You can't write the definitive book on any topic for a semester-long class. Be specific about what you want to do, and then be specific about what steps will get you there. For example, if you are writing a student guide on voting, the first

step is to ask students why they don't vote and write a small section about that to see if you are on the right track.

Many companies divide large projects in what they call sprints. These are much smaller tasks that can be achieved in one to two weeks. For a university class, you may not have much more than two weeks to accomplish your project—in my classes, I now imagine my class as one big project and divide that into sprints, but most instructors don't do this. This is why scope is so important. Look at the assignment sheet and divide the writing into smaller components, so you can focus on each one at a time.

So, before you even begin your project, list out all the tasks required to get that project done. If you end up with an overwhelming list that is difficult to schedule in sprints or sections, then your scope is too large (students rarely have scopes that are too small, so get as small as possible). Identify important milestones for each class meeting or for two to three checkpoints each week.

2. Prioritize & Organize

For software developers, a "complete" text is impossible. Software is too big, complicated, and always changing. Let's be honest, it's possible you won't get all the tasks done on your list. So, look at the assignment sheet and determine which tasks are essential and which are not.

Prioritization is where agile processes truly shine. If you've written out all the tasks associated with your project, you probably feel overwhelmed. Consistently reflecting on your list is key. Tasks can be prioritized in four ways: difficulty, size, urgency, or importance. Many organizations use a combination of prioritization methods, or different methods for different task types. Each of these characteristics are relative—what's important, difficult or big for one group may not be for the next group. So agile processes provide simple metrics.

Table 1. Prioritization Methods.

Method	Name	Difficulty
Difficulty	Fibonacci	1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13
Size	T-Shirt	S, M, L, XL
Urgency	Severity Matrix	Low, Medium, High, Urgent
Importance	MoSCoW	Must Have, Should Have, Could Have, Won't Have

You also want to be clear about who is doing what. Group work falls apart when no one knows what everyone else is doing. If we are really diligent about writing down all our tasks, the list will be daunting, even when prioritized. This is why a trustworthy system includes tracking and communication.

Creating a Kanban system is one of the easiest ways to accomplish this. Though the word *Kanban* may seem unfamiliar, you'll likely recognize the workflow instantly. In the 1940s, Toyota sought to optimize their workflow by using a "supermarket" system. They organized tasks with shelves, using sticky notes on a wall or whiteboard where everyone can see all the tasks simultaneously. Though there are many ways to do this, the most basic system looks like this:

Inbox or Backlog → To Do (or Next) → Doing → Done



Figure 3. Kanban Board showing the "To Do," "Doing," and "Done" columns. Image by Jeff.lasovski licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

As a team, everyone decides what are the most important tasks and places them in the To-Do or Next column. When a team member is looking for a new task, they simply go to this column and find the most important. They write their name on the sticky note and move it to the Doing column. Everyone knows that task is being worked on and can move on to a different task. This also provides a sense of accountability, especially if a task is dependent on someone else finishing their work.

When Toyota developed their Kanban system in the 1940s, they simply used a wall with sticky notes. Now you'll find many software platforms that help groups organize their workflow in this way. Which tools you choose doesn't really matter, as long as you and your team can access the board and update it regularly.

Table 2. Kanban Tools

Tool	Notes
Whiteboard & Sticky Notes	Simplest if you meet often in the same location
Microsoft Word or Google Docs	Just create a Table manually or move tasks from one document to the next
Notion	Allows you to see tasks as a Kanban board or lists. Free for students
Trello	Popular task management system that organizes notes and tasks in cards and columns
Microsoft Project	Kanban system that integrates with other Microsoft tools

Moriah notes that many employees at nCino use these kinds of tools to stay transparent with their teams and communicate different needs. nCino actually allows each team to choose whichever tool they find most useful. For example, most of the tech writers use JIRA:

> We use JIRA (a Kanban program) to plan our work, but we also use it to show our own managers as well as our development teams where we are in our documentation process. We also use JIRA as a tool in our review process to get reviews from other tech writers and from members of our development teams. We are not limited to JIRA.

Thinking back to the agile techniques of audience dialogue and adapting to change, it is important to be honest about limitations and scope, and a good task management system can help with this. If the team has taken on too much scope, it is best to adapt the plan as soon as possible rather than push on with the original plan.

Your group goals should guide your prioritization. If your goal is to get an A, prioritize the tasks that connect to the instructor's rubric or assignment sheet. If your goal is to create a project that can be used by students,

prioritize those tasks. It is usually a good idea to do the most difficult first. Also, decide on a convenient space where everyone can keep close track of all the tasks and how they are progressing.

3. Create Opportunities for Multiple Iterations

At the end of each sprint, you should have what is usually called a *deliverable*—this is not a draft. You might call this a prototype or a piece of a draft. The draft that you bring to peer review or workshop should not be your first deliverable. Each sprint should end with something you can show your instructor, a user, a potential audience, or just your fellow team members. Here are just a few examples:

- Analysis of some research
- Introduction draft that tests your idea of audience
- Outline
- Group of images you might use
- Draft survey or interview questions
- Audio/Visual Demo

Keep in mind that you may never use any particular deliverable in a final draft. Or you might use it with some alterations. Or you might completely rewrite or redo the deliverable. Though it is always useful to have something that can go into your final project, the goal here is to get feedback. Perfection is unnecessary and counterproductive.

Before starting a project, identify a deliverable for each sprint or timeline. Sometimes your instructor will not assign opportunities for these kinds of small deliverables, though check the schedule and assignment sheet. Now align your tasks with each deliverable. You've just created your sprints. After each deliverable, it is important to reflect and discuss with your team how your project is going, so that you can make adjustments.

4. Keep Communication Channels Open

Perhaps the most important element of any project management system is communication. Most agile projects involve what are called stand-up meetings. When you are working at a company, these happen every day to make sure everyone knows what everyone else is doing and what issues have come up. The three main questions are:

1. What have you done?

2. What will you do?

3. What challenges have arisen?

These should be very short meetings; each person talks for no longer than a minute. If everyone stands-up, it is much more likely that people will stick to this rule.

Communicating about each task and your group's overall workflow is key, regardless of what kind of system you use. If you are using sticky notes, you can annotate each note as you work on the tasks and talk about them as a group. If you are using Trello or MS projects, you can assign tasks to group members, make notes, and add attachments.

These days it is also important to have another channel of communication, besides email, to keep each other up to date. Most businesses now use what are called *Enterprise Social Networks* (ESN) — basically, social media just for the organization or company. Chances are your university has one that faculty may or may not be using. Here are just a few popular ones:

- Facebook Workplace
- Google Chat
- Microsoft Teams
- Slack

Employees (and probably students) find email overwhelming and difficult to maintain. If you email a teammate a short question, it is likely to get buried. Most workers these days reserve email for more formal exchanges with groups of employees, management, or external stakeholders. Teams use ESNs to keep communication channels open, give updates, and ask quick questions

Decide as a group how often you need to check in. Though it may not be every day, it should be at least 3 times a week and outside of class. This doesn't necessarily have to be in person either. You can use a messenger app, your university's learning management system, or some other collaboration tool that your group thinks will work best. The key is to make it as convenient as possible.

Conclusion

You may have encountered collaborative work in limited ways in your education thus far. The American education system still tends to rely on the evaluation of individual competencies, which is often called a "meritocracy." Theoretically, you advance based on the merit of your own success. This is not entirely true in the 21st-century workplace. Yes, you may be

awarded for personal wins, but ultimately your success will often depend on others and how well you work with others. You might be a fantastic writer or scientist or computer programmer, but if you can't build and maintain systems of trust—a community of collaborators—then your success in the workplace will be limited. As Moriah recently put it: "People trust you irrevocably to just do your job, no matter what."

That kind of responsibility can be scary, if we are honest with ourselves. Most writers have to adapt to this new distributed workflow when they join the workforce. Becka experienced this soon after she was hired:

> At first, the lack of structured oversight in technical writing can be stressful or overwhelming, especially when compared to the traditional academic experience. But ultimately, this is what enables us to grow and innovate like we do. While the ideas and business value concepts come from the executives, the engineers and writers decide how to accomplish this work because they're the ones who complete it.

Since all writing is collaborative one way or another, all writing is about building trust in some way. It is essential to choose technologies that will contribute to this trust no matter what your writing environment. The success of your project depends it. As a university student, now is the time not only to become a better writer, but a better collaborator.

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Teacher Resources for Technologies of Trust: Creating Networks of Goodwill for Collaboration

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This chapter explores the differences between writing in the workplace and how we often assign large writing projects in the university. In large organizations, writing is mostly collaborative, requiring more systematic approaches to project management. Too often in the university, we assign group work without explicitly teaching how to organize projects, especially with writing. Students who graduate and get writing jobs must learn to adapt quickly to these collaborative environments. We can better prepare students to thrive in the workplace and enhance group work in academia by getting them to think about the collaborative process, just as we get them to think about the writing process. Though the strategies and ideas in this chapter are not prescriptive, they can get students thinking about the tools and processes they use to manage large writing projects. Students will also become familiar with key methodologies and tools already being used in the professional world. Not only will your groups work go better, but students will also be better prepared for workplace writing, regardless of whether they end up in a writing-focused role or not.

This chapter really just scratches the surface by highlighting the most salient methodologies and tools used in many software and technology industries. We've included thoughts from actual workplace writers, as well as some practical tips for application. This reading can be used to help groups organize their project before getting started. If you want to dig deeper into collaborative writing, students can explore specific strategies or tools. Below, we offer a few questions and activities that can be used for these instances.

Questions

1. In the introduction of this essay, the authors list reasons why we all hate group work. How do these reasons compare to your own experiences? Would you add any reasons? What ways have you worked to overcome these obstacles in the past?

2. What kinds of tools have you used to communicate in group work? How have you managed editing or group communication? Discuss advantages and disadvantages.

3. This article mentions several tools and applications used to collaborate in the workplace. Research one of these or an alternative. Test it out. Report back to the class about the affordances and constraints of the tool, so that each group can decide whether or not to use it.

Activities

Team Charter

Spend a class in groups getting to know each other and learning what drives each person in the group. Have students create a team charter together on Google Docs. Team charters often include things like:

- Mission statement
- Assessment strategy (How will we know we've succeeded?)
- Cultural code or respect compact
- Communication processes
- Other ground rules or working agreements

App Analysis

Explore with your class the biggest concerns about group work, then identify a group of apps or tools that might mitigate those concerns. For example, if lack of communication is a concern, then choose some messaging apps. Have each group explore one of these apps for a couple days and report back to the class with their findings.

Workplace Culture

Have students discuss what kinds of culture they've encountered in their workplaces or in different school settings. Have each group choose an organization and analyze their mission or culture page on the web. Discuss what cultural elements might transfer to your particular group project.

6 How to Analyze Data in a Primary Research Study

Melody Denny and Lindsay Clark

Overview

This chapter introduces students to the idea of working with primary research data grounded in qualitative inquiry, closed-and open-ended methods, and research ethics (Driscoll; Mackey and Gass; Morse; Scott and Garner).* We know this can seem intimidating to students, so we will walk them through the process of analyzing primary research, using information from public datasets including the Pew Research Center. Using sample data on teen social media use, we share our processes for analyzing sample data to demonstrate different approaches for analyzing primary research data (Charmaz; Creswell; Merriam and Tisdale; Saldaña). We also include links to additional public data sets, chapter discussion prompts, and sample activities for students to apply these strategies.

At this point in your education, you are familiar with what is known as secondary research or what many students think of as library research. Secondary research makes use of sources most often found in the library or, these days, online (books, journal articles, magazines, and many others). There's another kind of research that you may or may not be familiar with: primary research. *The Purdue OWL* defines primary research as "any type of research you collect yourself" and lists examples as interviews, observations, and surveys ("What is Primary Research").

Primary research is typically divided into two main types—quantitative and qualitative research. These two methods (or a mix of these) are used by many fields of study, so providing a singular definition for these

is a bit tricky. Sheard explains that "quantitative research…deals with data that are numerical or that can be converted into numbers. The basic methods used to investigate numerical data are called 'statistics'" (429). Guest, et al. explain that qualitative research is "information that is difficult to obtain through more quantitatively-oriented methods of data collection" and is used more "to answer the *whys* and *hows* of human behavior, opinion, and experience" (1).

This chapter focuses on qualitative methods that explore peoples' behaviors, interpretations, and opinions. Rather than being only a reader and reporter of research, primary research allows you to be creators of research. Primary research provides opportunities to collect information based on your specific research questions and generate new knowledge from those questions to share with others. Generally, primary research tends to follow these steps:

1. *Develop a research question.* Secondary research often uses this as a starting point as well. With primary research, however, rather than using library research to answer your research question, you'll also collect data yourself to answer the question you developed. Data, in this case, is the information you collect yourself through methods such as interviews, surveys, and observations.

2. *Decide on a research method.* According to Scott and Garner, "A research method is a recognized way of collecting or producing [primary data], such as a survey, interview, or content analysis of documents" (8). In other words, the method is how you obtain the data.

3. *Collect data.* Merriam and Tisdale clarify what it means to collect data: "data collection is about asking, watching, and reviewing" (105-106). Primary research might include asking questions via surveys or interviews, watching or observing interactions or events, and examining documents or other texts.

4. *Analyze data.* Once data is collected, it must then be analyzed. "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data… Basically, data analysis is the process used to answer your research question(s)" (Merriam and Tisdale 202). It's worth noting that many researchers collect data and analyze at the same time, so while these may seem like different steps in the process, they actually overlap.

5. *Report findings.* Once the researcher has spent time understanding and interpreting the data, they are then ready to write about their research, often called "findings." You may also see this referred to as "results."

While the entire research process is discussed, this chapter focuses on the analysis stage of the process (step 4). Depending on where you are in the research process, you may need to spend more time on step 1, 2, or 3 and review Driscoll's "Introduction to Primary Research" (Volume 2 of *Writing Spaces*).

Primary research can seem daunting, and some students might think that they can't do primary research, that this type of research is for professionals and scholars, but that's simply not true. It's true that primary research data can be difficult to collect and even more difficult to analyze, but the findings are typically very revealing. This chapter and the examples included break down this research process and demonstrate how general curiosity can lead to exciting chances to learn and share information that is relevant and interesting. The goal of this chapter is to provide you with some information about data analysis and walk you through some activities to prepare you for your own data analysis. The next section discusses analyzing data from closed-ended methods and open-ended methods.

Data from Primary Research

As stated above, this chapter doesn't focus on methods, but before moving on to analysis, it's important to clarify a few things related to methods as they are directly connected to analyzing data. As a quick reminder, a research method is how researchers collect their data such as surveys, interviews, or textual analysis. No matter which method used, researchers need to think about the types of questions to ask for answering their overall research question. Generally, there are two types of questions to consider: closed-ended and open-ended. The next section provides examples of the data you might receive from asking closed-ended and open-ended questions and options for analyzing and presenting that data.

Data from Closed-Ended Methods

The data that is generated by closed-ended questions on methods such as surveys and polls is often easier to organize. Because the way respondents could answer those questions is limited to specific answers (Yes/No, numbered scales, multiple choice), the data can be analyzed by each question

or by looking at the responses individually or as a whole. Though there are several approaches to analyzing the data that comes from closed-ended questions, this section will introduce you to a few different ways to make sense of this kind of data.

Closed-ended questions are those that have limited answers, like multiple choice or check-all-that-apply questions. These questions mean that respondents can provide only the answers given or they may select an "other" option. An example of a closed-ended question could be "Do you use YouTube? Yes, No, Sometimes." Closed-ended questions have their perks because they (mostly) keep participants from misinterpreting the question or providing unhelpful responses. They also make data analysis a bit easier.

If you were to ask the "Yes, No, Sometimes" question about YouTube to 20 of your closest friends, you may get responses like Yes = 18, No = 1, and Sometimes = 1. But, if you were to ask a more detailed question like "Which of the following social media platforms do you use?" and provide respondents with a check-all-that-apply option, like "Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, and Tumblr," you would get a very different set of data. This data might look like Facebook = 17, YouTube = 18, Twitter = 12, Instagram = 20, Snapchat = 15, Reddit = 8, and Tumblr = 3. The big takeaway here is that how you ask the question determines the type of data you collect.

Analyzing Closed-Ended Data

Now that you have data, it's time to think about analyzing and presenting that data. Luckily, the Pew Research Center conducted a similar study that can be used as an example. The Pew Research Center is a "nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis and other empirical social science research" ("About Pew Research Center"). The information provided below comes from their public dataset "Teens, Social Media, and Technology, 2018" (Anderson and Jiang). This example is used to show how you might analyze this type of data once collected and what that data might look like. "Teens, Social Media, and Technology 2018" reported responses to questions related to which online platforms teens use and which they use most often. In figure 1 below, Pew researchers show the final product of their analysis of the data:

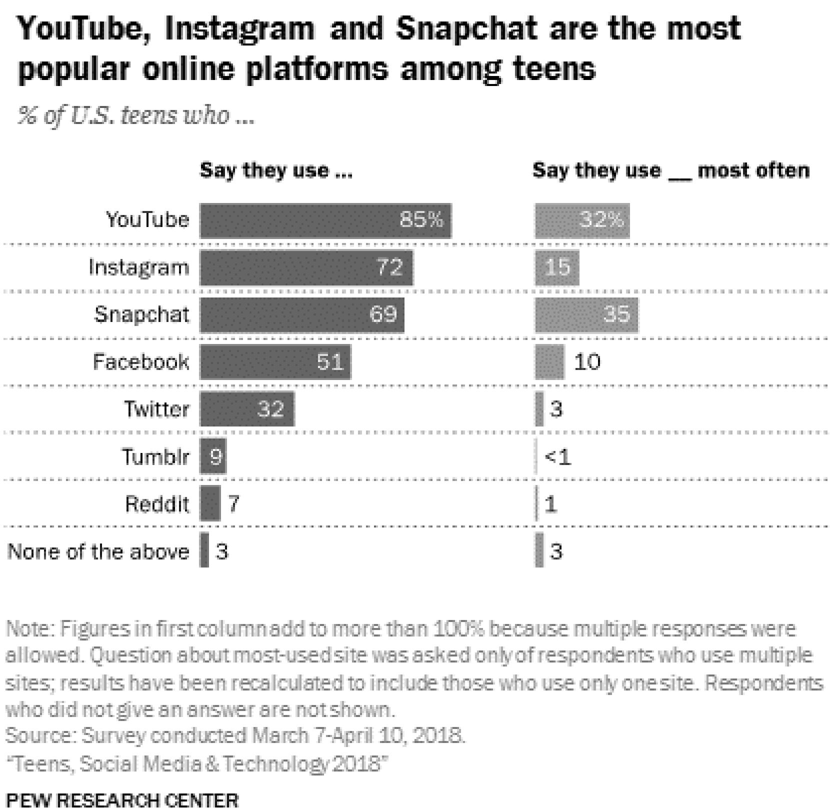


Figure 1. Social Media Usage Statistics from Pew's "Teens, Social Media, and Technology 2018" dataset. Figure shows popularity of social media platforms from most to least popular: YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit. Used with permission from Pew Research Center.

Pew analyzed their data and organized the findings by percentages to show what they discovered. They had 743 teens who responded to these questions, so presenting their findings in percentages helps readers better "see" the data overall (rather than saying YouTube = 631 and Instagram = 535). However, results can be represented in different ways. When the Pew researchers were deciding how to present their data, they could have reported the frequency, or the number of people who said they used YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.

In the scenario of polling 20 of your closest friends, you, too, would need to decide how to present your data: Facebook = 17, YouTube = 18,

Twitter = 12, Instagram = 20, Snapchat = 15, Reddit = 8, and Tumblr = 3. In your case, you might want to present the frequency (number) of responses rather than the percentages of responses like Pew did. You could choose a bar graph like Pew or maybe a simple table to show your data.

Looking again at the Pew data, researchers could use this data to generate further insights or questions about user preferences. For example, one could highlight the fact that 85% of respondents reported using YouTube the most, while only 7% reported using Reddit. Why is that? What conclusions might you be able to make based on these data? Does the data make you wonder if any additional questions might be explored? If you want to learn more about your respondents' opinions or preference, you might need to ask open-ended questions.

Data from Open-Ended Methods

Whereas closed-ended questions limit how respondents might answer, open-ended questions do not limit respondents' answers and allow them to answer more freely. An example of an open-ended question, to build off the question above, could be "Why do you use social media? Explain." This type of question gives respondents more space to fully explain their responses. Open-ended questions can make the data varied because each respondent may answer differently. These questions, which can provide fruitful responses, can also mean unexpected responses or responses that don't help to answer the overall research question, which can sometimes make data analysis challenging.

In that same Pew Research Center data, respondents were likely limited in how they were able to answer by selecting social media platforms from a list. Pew also shares selected data (Appendix A), and based on these data, it can be assumed they also asked open-ended questions, something about the positive or negative effects of social media platforms. Because their research method included both closed-ended questions about which platforms teens use as well as open-ended questions that invited their thoughts about social media, Pew researchers were able to learn more about these participants' thoughts and perceptions. To give us, the readers, a clearer idea of how they justified their presentation of the data, Pew offers 15 sample excerpts from those open-ended questions. They explain that these excerpts are what the researchers believe are representative of the larger data set. We explain below how we might analyze those excerpts.

Analyzing Open-Ended Data

As Driscoll reminds us, ethical considerations impact all stages of the research process, and researchers should act ethically throughout the entire research process. You already know a little something about research ethics. For example, you know that ethical writers cite sources used in research papers by giving credit to the person who created that information. When creating primary sources, you have a few different ethical considerations for analyzing data, which will be discussed below.

To demonstrate how to analyze data from open-ended methods, we explain how we (Melody and Lindsay) analyzed the 15 excerpts from the Pew data using open coding. Open coding means analyzing the data without any predetermined categories or themes; researchers are just seeing what emerges or seems significant (Charmaz). Creswell suggests four specific steps when coding qualitative data, though he also stresses that these steps are iterative, meaning that researchers may need to revisit a step anywhere throughout the process. We use these four steps to explain our analysis process, including how we ethically coded the data, interpreted what the coding process revealed, and worked together to identify and explain categories we saw in the data.

Step 1: Organizing and Preparing the Data

The first part of the analysis stage is organizing the data before examining it. When organizing data, researchers must be careful to work with primary data ethically because that data often represents actual peoples' information and opinions. Therefore, researchers need to carefully organize the data in such a way as to not identify their participants or reveal who they are. This is a key component to *The Belmont Report,* guidelines published in 1979 meant to guide researchers and help protect participants. Using pseudonyms or assigning numbers or codes (in place of names) to the data is a recommended ethical step to maintain participants' confidentiality in a study. Anonymizing data, or removing names, has the additional effect of eliminating researcher bias, which can occur when researchers are so familiar with their own data and participants that the researchers may begin to think they already know the answers or see connections prior to analysis (Driscoll). By assigning pseudonyms, researchers can also ensure that they take an objective look at each participant's answers without being persuaded by participant identity.

The first part of coding is to make notations while reading through the data (Merriam and Tisdale). At this point, researchers are open to many possibilities regarding their data. This is also where researchers begin to construct categories. Offering a simple example to illustrate this decision-making process, Merriam and Tisdale ask us to imagine sorting and categorizing two hundred grocery store items (204). Some items could be sorted into more than one category; for example, ice cream could be categorized as "frozen" or as "dessert." How you decide to sort that item depends on your research question and what you want to learn.

For this step, we, Melody and Lindsay, each created a separate document that included the 15 excerpts. Melody created a table for the quotes, leaving a column for her coding notes, and Lindsay added spaces between the excerpts for her notes. For our practice analysis, we analyzed the data independently, and then shared what we did to compare, verify, and refine our analysis. This brings a second, objective view to the analysis, reduces the effect of researcher bias, and ensures that your analysis can be verified and supported by the data. To support your analysis, you need to demonstrate how you developed the opinions and conclusions you have about your data. After all, when researchers share their analyses, readers often won't see all of the raw data, so they need to be able to trust the analysis process.

Step 2: Reading through All the Data

Creswell suggests getting a general sense of the data to understand its overall meaning. As you start reading through your data, you might begin to recognize trends, patterns, or recurring features that give you ideas about how to both analyze and later present the data. When we read through the interview excerpts of these 15 participants' opinions of social media, we both realized that there were two major types of comments: positive and negative. This might be similar to categorizing the items in the grocery store (mentioned above) into fresh/frozen foods and non-perishable items.

To better organize the data for further analysis, Melody marked each positive comment with a plus sign and each negative comment with a minus sign. Lindsay color-coded the comments (red for negative, indicated by boldface type below; green for positive, indicated by grey type below) and then organized them on the page by type. This approach is in line with Merriam and Tisdale's explanation of coding: "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data. The designations can be single

words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or combinations of these" (199). While we took different approaches, as shown the two sections below, both allowed us to visually recognize the major sections of the data:

Lindsay's Coding Round 1, which shows her color coding indicated by boldface type

> "[Social media] allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. [It] gives us a voice that can reach many people." (Boy, age 15)
>
> **"It makes it harder for people to socialize in real life, because they become accustomed to not interacting with people in person." (Girl, age 15)**
>
> **"[Teens] would rather go scrolling on their phones instead of doing their homework, and it's so easy to do so. It's just a huge distraction." (Boy, age 17)**
>
> "It enables people to connect with friends easily and be able to make new friends as well." (Boy, age 15)
>
> "I think social media have a positive effect because it lets you talk to family members far away." (Girl, age 14)
>
> **"Because teens are killing people all because of the things they see on social media or because of the things that happened on social media." (Girl, age 14)**
>
> "We can connect easier with people from different places and we are more likely to ask for help through social media which can save people." (Girl, age 15)

Melody's Coding Round 1, showing her use of plus and minus signs to classify the comments as positive or negative, respectively

+ "[Social media] allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. [It] gives us a voice that can reach many people." (Boy, age 15)

- "It makes it harder for people to socialize in real life, because they become accustomed to not interacting with people in person." (Girl, age 15)

- "[Teens] would rather go scrolling on their phones instead of doing their homework, and it's so easy to do so. It's just a huge distraction." (Boy, age 17)

+ "It enables people to connect with friends easily and be able to make new friends as well." (Boy, age 15)

+ "I think social media have a positive effect because it lets you talk to family members far away." (Girl, age 14)

- "Because teens are killing people all because of the things they see on social media or because of the things that happened on social media." (Girl, age 14)

+ "We can connect easier with people from different places and we are more likely to ask for help through social media which can save people." (Girl, age 15)

Step 3: Doing Detailed Coding Analysis of the Data

It's important to mention that Creswell dedicates pages of description on coding data because there are various ways of approaching detailed analysis. To code our data, we added a descriptive word or phrase that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" to a portion of data (Saldaña 3). From the grocery store example above, that could mean looking at the category of frozen foods and dividing them into entrees, side dishes, desserts, appetizers, etc. We both coded

for topics or what the teens were generally talking about in their responses. For example, one excerpt reads "Social media allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. It gives us a voice that can reach many people." To code that piece of data, researchers might assign words like communication, voice, or connection to explain what the data is describing.

In this way, we created the codes from what the data said, describing what we read in those excerpts. Notice in the section below that, even though we coded independently, we described these pieces of data in similar ways using bolded keywords:

Melody's Coding Round 2, with key words added to summarize the meanings of the different quotes

- "Gives people a bigger audience to speak and teach hate and belittle each other." (Boy, age 13) **bullying**

- "It provides a fake image of someone's life. It sometimes makes me feel that their life is perfect when it is not." (Girl, age 15) **fake**

+ "Because a lot of things created or made can spread joy." (Boy, age 17) reaching people

+ "I feel that social media can make people my age feel less lonely or alone. It creates a space where you can interact with people." (Girl, age 15) **connection**

+ "[Social media] allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. [It] gives us a voice that can reach many people." (Boy, age 15) **reaching people**

Lindsay's Coding Round 2, with key words added in capital letters to summarize the meanings of the quotations

"Gives people a bigger audience to speak and teach hate and belittle each other." (Boy, age 13) OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE NEGATIVELY/MORE EASILY

> "It provides a fake image of someone's life. It sometimes makes me feel that their life is perfect when it is not." (Girl, age 15) FAKE, NOT REALITY
>
> "Because a lot of things created or made can spread joy." (Boy, age 17) SPREAD JOY
>
> "I feel that social media can make people my age feel less lonely or alone. It creates a space where you can interact with people." (Girl, age 15) INTERACTION, LESS LONELY
>
> "[Social media] allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. [It] gives us a voice that can reach many people." (Boy, age 15) COMMUNICATE, VOICE

Though there are methods that allow for researchers to use predetermined codes (like from previous studies), "the traditional approach...is to allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis" (Creswell 187).

Step 4: Using the Codes to Create a Description Using Categories, Themes, Settings, or People

Our individual coding happened in phases, as we developed keywords and descriptions that could then be defined and relabeled into concise coding categories (Saldaña 11). We shared our work from Steps 1-3 to further define categories and determine which themes were most prominent in the data. A few times, we interpreted something differently and had to discuss and come to an agreement about which category was best.

In our process, one excerpt comment was interpreted as negative by one of us and positive by the other. Together we discussed and confirmed which comments were positive or negative and identified themes that seemed to appear more than once, such as positive feelings towards the interactional element of social media use and the negative impact of social media use on social skills. When two coders compare their results, this allows for qualitative validity, which means "the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings" (Creswell 190). This could also be referred to as intercoder reliability (Lavrakas). For intercoder reliability, researchers sometimes calculate how often they agree in a percentage. Like many other aspects of primary research, there is no consensus on how best to establish or calculate intercoder reliability, but generally speaking, it's a good idea to

have someone else check your work and ensure you are ethically analyzing and reporting your data.

Interpreting Coded Data

Once we agreed on the common categories and themes in this dataset, we worked together on the final analysis phase of interpreting the data, asking "what does it mean?" Data interpretation includes "trying to give sense to the data by creatively producing insights about it" (Gibson and Brown 6). Though we acknowledge that this sample of only 15 excerpts is small, and it might be difficult to make claims about teens and social media from just this data, we can share a few insights we had as part of this practice activity.

Overall, we could report the frequency counts and percentages that came from our analysis. For example, we counted 8 positive comments and 7 negative comments about social media. Presented differently, those 8 positive comments represent 53% of the responses, so slightly over half. If we focus on just the positive comments, we are able to identify two common themes among those 8 responses: Interaction and Expression. People who felt positively about social media use identified the ability to connect with people and voice their feelings and opinions as the main reasons. When analyzing only the 7 negative responses, we identified themes of Bullying and Social Skills as recurring reasons people are critical of social media use among teens. Identifying these topics and themes in the data allows us to begin thinking about what we can learn and share with others about this data.

How we represent what we have learned from our data can demonstrate our ethical approach to data analysis. In short, we only want to make claims we can support, and we want to make those claims ethically, being careful to not exaggerate or be misleading.

To better understand a few common ethical dilemmas regarding the presentation of data, think about this example: A few years ago, Lindsay taught a class that had only four students. On her course evaluations, those four students rated the class experience as "Excellent." If she reports that 100% of her students answered "Excellent," is she being truthful? Yes. Do you see any potential ethical considerations here? If she said that 4/4 gave that rating, does that change how her data might be perceived by others? While Lindsay could show the raw data to support her claims, important contextual information could be missing if she just says 100%. Perhaps others would assume this was a regular class of 20-30 students, which would make that claim seem more meaningful and impressive than it might be.

Another word for this is cherry picking. Cherry picking refers to making conclusions based on thin (or not enough) data or focusing on data that's not necessarily representative of the larger dataset (Morse). For example, if Lindsay reported the comment that one of her students made about this being the "best class ever," she would be telling the truth but really only focusing on the reported opinion of 25% of the class (1 out of 4). Ideally, researchers want to make claims about the data based on ideas that are prominent, trending, or repeated. Less prominent pieces of data, like the opinion of that one student, are known as outliers, or data that seem to "be atypical of the rest of the dataset" (Mackey and Gass 257). Focusing on those less-representative portions might misrepresent or overshadow the aspects of the data that are prominent or meaningful, which could create ethical problems for your study. With these ethical considerations in mind, the last step of conducting primary research would be to write about the analysis and interpretation to share your process with others.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced you to ethically analyzing data within the primary research tradition by focusing on close-ended and open-ended data. We've provided you with examples of how data might be analyzed, interpreted, and presented to help you understand the process of making sense of your data. This is just one way to approach data analysis, but no matter your research method, having a systematic approach is recommended. Data analysis is a key component in the overall primary research process, and we hope that you are now excited and curious to participate in a primary research project.

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Appendix A

"My mom had to get a ride to the library to get what I have in my hand all the time. She reminds me of that a lot." (Girl, age 14)

"Gives people a bigger audience to speak and teach hate and belittle each other." (Boy, age 13)

"It provides a fake image of someone's life. It sometimes makes me feel that their life is perfect when it is not." (Girl, age 15)

"Because a lot of things created or made can spread joy." (Boy, age 17)

"I feel that social media can make people my age feel less lonely or alone. It creates a space where you can interact with people." (Girl, age 15)

"[Social media] allows us to communicate freely and see what everyone else is doing. [It] gives us a voice that can reach many people." (Boy, age 15)

"It makes it harder for people to socialize in real life, because they become accustomed to not interacting with people in person." (Girl, age 15)

"[Teens] would rather go scrolling on their phones instead of doing their homework, and it's so easy to do so. It's just a huge distraction." (Boy, age 17)

"It enables people to connect with friends easily and be able to make new friends as well." (Boy, age 15)

"I think social media have a positive effect because it lets you talk to family members far away." (Girl, age 14)

"Because teens are killing people all because of the things they see on social media or because of the things that happened on social media." (Girl, age 14)

"We can connect easier with people from different places and we are more likely to ask for help through social media which can save people." (Girl, age 15)

"It has given many kids my age an outlet to express their opinions and emotions, and connect with people who feel the same way." (Girl, age 15)

"People can say whatever they want with anonymity and I think that has a negative impact." (Boy, age 15)

"It has a negative impact on social (in-person) interactions." (Boy, age 17)

Teacher Resources for How to Analyze Data in a Primary Research Study

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This chapter is intended as an overview of analyzing qualitative research data and was written as a follow-up piece to Dana Lynn Driscoll's "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews" in Volume 2 of this collection. This chapter could work well for leading students through their own data analysis of a primary research project or for introducing students to the idea of primary research by using outside data sources, those in the chapter and provided in the activities below, or data you have access to.

From our experiences, students usually have limited experience with primary research methods outside of conducting a small survey for other courses, like sociology. We have found that few of our students have been formally introduced to primary research and analysis. Therefore, this chapter strives to briefly introduce students to primary research while focusing on analysis. We've presented analysis by categorizing data as open-ended and closed-ended without getting into too many details about qualitative versus quantitative. Our students tend to produce data collection tools with a mix of these types of questions, so we feel it's important to cover the analysis of both.

In this chapter, we bring students real examples of primary data and lead them through analysis by showing examples. Any of these exercises and the activities below may be easily supplemented with additional outside data. One way that teachers can bring in outside data is through the use of public datasets.

Public Data Sets

There are many public data sets that teachers can use to acquaint their students with analyzing data. Be aware that some of these datasets are for experienced researchers and provide the data in CSV files or include metadata, all of which is probably too advanced for most of our students. But if you are comfortable converting this data, it could be valuable for a data analysis activity.

- In the chapter, we pulled from Pew Research, and their website contains many free and downloadable data sets (Pew Research Center).
- The site Data.gov provides searchable datasets, but you can also explore their data by clicking on "data" and seeing what kinds of reports they offer.
- The U.S. Census Bureau offers some datasets as well (Explore Census Data): Much of this data is presented in reports, but teachers could pull information from reports and have students analyze the data and compare their results to those in the report, much like we did with the Pew Research data in the chapter.
- Similarly, HealthData.gov offers research-based reports packed with data for students to analyze.
- In one of the activities below, we used Google Trends to look at searches over a period of time. There are some interesting data and visuals provided on the homepage to help students get started.
- If you're looking for something a bit more academic, the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English is a great database of transcripts from academic interactions and situations.
- Similarly, the Corpus of Contemporary American English allows users to search for words or word strings to see their frequency and in which genre and when these occur.

Before moving on to student activities, we'd like to offer one additional suggestion for teachers to consider.

Class Google Form

One thing that Melody does at the beginning of almost all of her research-based writing courses is ask students to complete a Google Form at the beginning of the semester. Sometimes, these forms are about their experiences with research. Other times, they revolve around a class topic (recently, she's been interested in Generation Z or iGeneration and has asked students questions related to that). Then, when it's time to start thinking about primary research, she uses that Google Form to help students understand more about the primary research process. Here are some ways that teachers can employ the data gathered from Google Form given to students.

- Ask students to look at the questions asked on the survey and deduce the overall research question.

- Ask students to look at the types of questions asked (open- and closed-ended) and consider why they were constructed that way.
- Ask students to evaluate the wording of the questions asked.
- Ask students to examine the results of a few (or more) or the questions on the survey. This can be done in groups with each group looking at 1-3 questions, depending on the size of your Google Form.
- Ask students to think about how they might present that data in visual form. Yes, Google provides some visuals, but you can give them the raw data and see what they come up with.
- Ask students to come up with 1-3 major takeaways based on all the data.

This exercise allows students to work with real data and data that's directly related to them and their classmates. It's also completely within ethical boundaries because it's data collected in the classroom, for educational purposes, and it stays within the classroom.

Below we offer some guiding questions to help move students through the chapter and the activities as well as some additional activities.

Discussion Questions

1. In the opening of this chapter, we introduced you to *primary research*, or "any type of research you collect yourself" ("What is Primary Research"). Have you completed primary research before? How did you decide on your research method, based on your research question? If you have not worked on primary research before, brainstorm a potential research question for a topic you want to know more about. Discuss what research method you might use, including closed- or open-ended methods and why.

2. Looking at the chart from the Pew Research dataset, "Teens, Social Media, and Technology 2018," would you agree that the distributions among online platforms remain similar, or have trends changed?

3. What do you make of the "none of the above" category on the Pew table? Do you think teens are using online platforms that aren't listed, or do you think those respondents don't use any online platforms?

4. Google Trends (figure 2 below) also allows researchers to look at web search data over time, by continent and related inquiries. On this site, we searched "teens and social media" and found another piece of data that shows interest over time. What does this graphic tell you? What other questions arise while looking at this data?

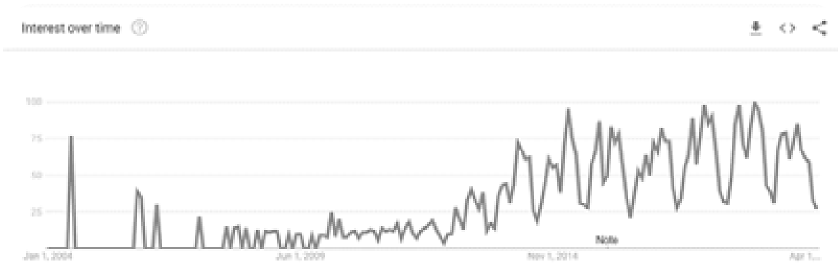


Figure 2. Google Trends for "Teens and Social Media." A line graph from Google Trends, showing how teen social media use has increased over time. Screenshot by authors.

5. When analyzing data from open-ended questions, which step seems most challenging to you? Explain.

Activities

Activity #1: TurnItIn and Infographics

Infographics can be a great way to help you see and understand data, while also giving you a way to think about presenting your own data. Multiple infographics are available on TurnItIn, downloadable for free, that provide information about plagiarism.

Figure 3, titled "The Plagiarism Spectrum," provides you with the "severity" and "frequency" based on survey findings of nearly 900 high school and college instructors from around the world. TurnItIn encourages educators to print this infographic and hang in their classroom:

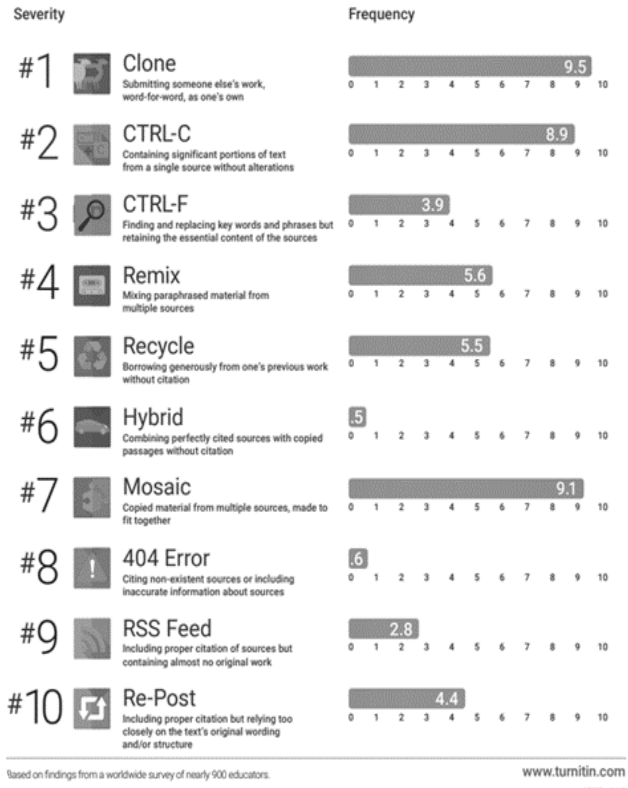


Figure 3. Plagiarism Spectrum. Infographic from TurnItIn illustrates the rates of student plagiarism, categorized by type of offense. Used with permission.

This infographic provides some great data analysis examples: specific categories with definitions (and visual representation of their categories), frequency counts with bar graphs, and color gradient bars to show higher vs. lower numbers.

1. Write a summary of how this infographic presents data.
2. How do you think they analyzed the data based on this visual?

Activity #2: How Text Messages Change from Dating to Marriage

In Alice Zhao's *Huffington Post* piece, she analyzes text messages that she collected during her relationship with her boyfriend, turned fiancé, turned husband to answer the question of how text messages (or communication)

change over the course of a relationship. While Zhao offers some insight into her data, she also provides readers with some really cool graphics that you can use to practice your analysis skills.

These first graphics are word clouds. In figure 4, Zhao put her textual data into a program that creates these images based on the most frequently occurring words. Word clouds are another option for analyzing your data. If you have a lot of textual data and want to know what participants said the most, placing your data into a word cloud program is an easy way to "see" the data in a new way. This is usually one of the first steps of analysis, and additional analysis is almost always needed.



Figure 4. Zhao's Word Cloud Sampling of Zhao's word clouds from analyzing text messages with her boyfriend; the larger the word, the more frequently that word appeared in the text. "Hey," "home," and "Ok" appear as frequently used words. Used with permission.

1. What do you notice about the texts from 2008 to 2014?

2. What do you notice between her texts (me) and his texts (him)?

Zhao also provided this graphic (figure 5), a comparative look at what she saw as the most frequently occurring words from the word clouds. This could be another step in your data analysis procedure: zooming in on a few key aspects and digging a bit deeper.

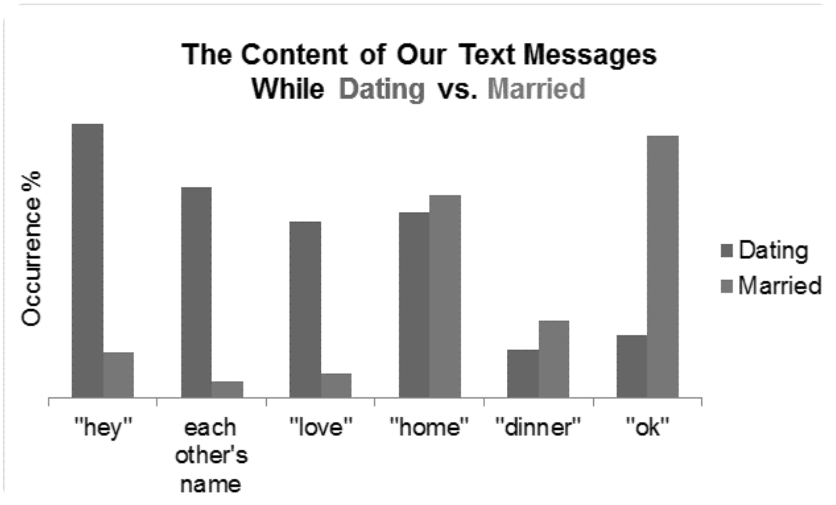


Figure 5. Zhao's Bar Graph of Frequently Occurring Words. Zhao's bar graph from her word clouds to show the most frequently occurring words they used when dating versus when married. Used with permission.

1. What do you make of this data? Why might the word "hey" occur more frequently in the dating time frame and the word "ok" occur more frequently in the married time frame?

As part of her research, Zhao also looked at the time of day text messages were sent, shown below in figure 6:

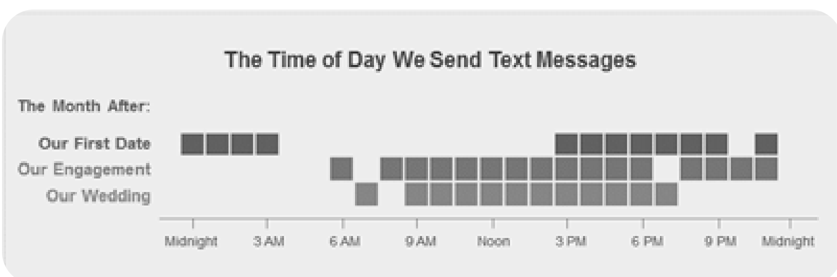


Figure 6. Zhao's Plot Graph of Time of Day. Zhao created a plot graph to show what time of day they texted most frequently, over the time period from dating to marriage. Used with permission.

Here, Zhao looked at messages sent a month after their first date, a month after their engagement, and a month after their wedding.

1. She offers her own interpretation in her piece in figure 6, but what do you think of this?
2. Also make note of this graphic. It's a great way to look at the data another way. If your data may be time sensitive, this type of graphic may help you better analyze and understand your data.

7 The Rhetorical Possibilities of Accessibility

Rachel Donegan

Overview

In this chapter, I provide some basic terminology and context for disability and accessibility and discuss how access features not only have direct benefits for a disabled audience, but are beneficial rhetorical bonuses for all writers (nondisabled and disabled).* By emphasizing access in their writing projects, students have the opportunity to improve their own writing. I also include details on three design choices students can make with first-year writing projects and presentations—alt text, headings and styles, and presentation scripts—and provide some tips and strategies for creating all three.

Imagine that you use a wheelchair to get around campus. Most of the time, this works fine. There are plenty of curb cuts so you can enter and exit sidewalks, and thanks to automatic doors, you can enter most buildings on campus. But you have a chemistry lab in this older building, and the building's only ramp is broken. You circle the building and look for other entrances, but it's impossible for you to get to your weekly lab. Frustrated, you email your professor and let them know that you can't enter the building and are unsure what you should do.

In this very real example, the fact that the chemistry building doesn't have a working ramp so you can get to class is your major problem, not the fact that you use a wheelchair to get around campus. This situation is a great example of the social model of disability, which points out that in many situations, disabled people are more impaired by nondisabled

people's reactions to their impairment than by the impairment itself (Oliver). A situation like this—where the environment and other people's lack of knowledge about access are more disabling than a particular impairment—can (and often does) apply to a myriad of other disabled people and access problems both on and off campus. This also applies to the projects and papers you'll create in first year writing, your other college classes, and even the kinds of writing you'll do when you finish college.

In this essay, I'll provide you with some tools and strategies—alt text for images, headings and styles in text documents, and presentation scripts—to get you started in becoming more accessible writers and project creators. In my experience, students haven't learned much about accessibility before college, and these three common strategies are good places to get your feet wet, to get started. There's no possible way that I could condense everything you should know about accessibility into one reading, but this article can serve as a "place to start," the beginning of looking at the spaces you move in and inhabit in more critical ways (Dolmage). Finding ways to be better and contribute to a more accessible world is part of what I call "being a good citizen of the world." Coming to college and learning practical skills that can help you build a career is a good thing. Learning how to be a good citizen of the world and to be more mindful and respectful of others is a great thing. It just so happens that having a basic understanding of accessibility and how to make projects more accessible has some amazing rhetorical benefits for you as a writer and designer. But the first reason to be accessible is the most important—so that we can be people who are more aware of injustices that affect vulnerable populations and work to be more equitable to all.

Alt Text: A Picture Is Worth at Least Ten or So Words

Scenario: You're assigned an online news article to read as a part of your History class homework. As someone with low vision, you rely on text-to-speech software programs to help you read through digital documents. Every few paragraphs, the software randomly and annoyingly announces, "Blank!" You can infer by reading that the article contains relevant graphs and images, but you have no idea what "Blank!" is or how crucial it is to understand "Blank!" for your assignment.

Why do we put pictures into our PowerPoints, Prezis, and research papers? To take up space? To add interest? To offer a deeper connection to the ideas? These are the questions that good alt text tries to answer for low

or no vision readers. Alt text refers to a description that is "hidden" in the formatting of a picture or a graphic, whether it is on a website or in some other kind of digital document. The text itself consists of a short caption (generally no more than one or two sentences) that describes what the image is and contains. It's the kind of access feature that you would only notice if you needed it, and its absence would cause lots of problems. If a reader or viewer uses JAWS (Job Access With Speech) or another screen reader program, they can use the program to "listen" to web pages, PDFs, Microsoft Word files, and other digital documents. The program methodically runs through the document or website and "reads" the text it comes across aloud.

However, unformatted images can produce a unique problem for these screen reading programs. As J. Hogue points out, without alt text, the reader just hears "IMAGE" or "BLANK" when the screen reader reaches a graphic—no details, no information, no context at all. If I close my eyes and hear someone randomly say the word, "BLANK," what comes to mind? Probably confusion and distraction. I'm no longer thinking about the document I've been listening to, and now I'm worried about what this random "BLANK" could possibly mean. To make things worse, without alt text, a reader using a screen reader isn't able to understand the information in the image or how the image connects to the text they *can* read.

As a designer and writer, alt text helps you provide context and information for whatever graphics you may include in a PowerPoint, a Word document, or even an image you might add to a website. The process of creating an alt text caption is a reflective one. It requires you as a writer or designer to examine both your motives and what you're hoping to communicate to the reader with that image. Helpful invention questions for creating solid alt text can include: "Why did I actually want to put a picture here?," "What do I want my reader to understand from this picture?," or "What about this picture do I want them to connect with the overall text of my document?"

Let's test some of these questions with a sample picture. With the image I've included here in Figure 1, insufficient alt text would be to label this image as "Seal of the State of Georgia." While this is *technically* true (and is much better over the autogenerated alt text, which described the image as a "decorative coin"), it isn't entirely accurate, as truth and accuracy can be very different ideas where alt text is concerned. The image isn't just an artistic representation of the seal or a photograph of the seal in an office building. It's a photograph of a stone engraving of the seal, and that alt text doesn't mention the other relevant details in the seal. Therefore, a better

caption for this alt text (that I actually wrote) would be: "A picture of the Seal of the State of Georgia (dated 1776), engraved into stone. The seal has three columns labeled 'wisdom,' 'justice,' and 'moderation,' with an arch labeled 'Constitution' connecting the three." While the exact level of detail will vary depending on how you're using the image in your document, good alt text works to give text-to-speech readers an accurate depiction of what an image is. But that may require a few more words than you may think.



Figure 1. A picture of the Seal of the state of Georgia (dated 1776), engraved into stone. The description on the seal has three columns labeled "wisdom," "justice," and "moderation," with a semi-circle labeled "constitution connecting the three. Photo by Gary Lee Todd under CC0 1.0 public domain license.

Even though the end product is something only a small group of people may use, the process of creating that access will strengthen your writing and overall project. In my sample image, the details I listed in the alt text could, depending on the writing project, provide some interesting jumping off points. How are the three values listed (wisdom, justice, and moderation) connected? Is the image (and therefore the state of Georgia at large) suggesting that the Constitution contains all three virtues, or does it imply that the Constitution unites or rules over these ideas? In this instance, thinking critically about alt text can provide some unexpected opportunities for critically analyzing the image, which can be helpful when writing longer pieces of writing.

Tips and Tricks for Making Good Alt Text

- Be accurate and watch out for too much repetition in your caption. Remember, whoever encounters the alt text will also be able to read the main content of your project, so be careful about unintentionally repeating yourself. It's surprisingly easy to do.
- Keep your captions short. If you find yourself writing what seems to be a never- ending list of descriptions, this could be an indication that the main body of your text isn't detailed enough or is missing a key piece of information. That information you're putting into the caption could be beneficial for all of your readers, not just those who hear the alt text.
- If you're curious at how your alt text would sound to someone using a screen reader, many universities have computers on campus that have JAWS, Dragon, or other screen reading software installed. Ask your instructor or librarian for more information about this.
- If you're using an image solely for decorative purposes, that's okay! You can designate (either in the caption or, depending on the program, by clicking a "decorative image" check box) that an image only serves a decorative purpose. Recently I was formatting some PDFs, and added several alt text captions that read, "decorative cursive letter 'G.'"

Headings and Styles: TL; DR

Scenario: You're working on a group paper with some classmates. It's finally your turn to add some material and read through the draft. However, because you use text-to-speech software to read digital documents, you cannot skip to the specific section you need—you have to listen to the entire paper being read aloud to find your section and proofread. Frustrated, you resign yourself to listening to a robotic voice read to you for the next hour or so.

I love making a good outline when I write. I know outlines are headache-inducing for some writers, but I've always loved the simplicity, order, and structure that outlines promote and provide. In a lot of ways, using an outline is less like using a road map (a metaphor I and other writing instructors are likely guilty of overusing) and more like a "TL; DR" label on a social media post. The "TL;DR" ("too long; didn't read") works great when you see a post that could be interesting but you're not sure if you want to go to the trouble of reading the entire post or not. With a TL;DR,

you can get the gist, the “big picture,” and *then* decide if you want to go back and read the rest or move on. And that’s exactly what a good outline provides—the big picture. You don’t have to read an outline the same way you do an essay or an article; you can glance at the outline as a whole and then skip to the section that you’re most interested in.

Integrating headings and styles into a text document works similarly to both outlines and TL;DR social media tags. They exist precisely so you *don’t* have to read every single word of a document or a webpage in order to find the exact section you’re looking for or determine if you need to read it at all. For readers who use text-to-speech programs like JAWS to read documents, this kind of functionality means not having to listen to every single word and enables these readers to jump between sections of a text and better read it as a whole. Considering that it takes significantly longer for most readers to listen to a document be read aloud than it does for them to read it silently, having headings and styles saves time and a great deal of frustration.

Nearly all document programs (including Microsoft Word and Google Docs) have headings and styles integrated into their systems specifically as accessibility features. (Even emails have headers you can use!) In Microsoft Word, you can find headings and styles under the “Home” tab, and there are options for titles, headings, emphasis, or even quotations. In the screenshot of Microsoft Word I’ve provided in Figure 2, you can see many different options listed, including ones for subtle and “*intense”* emphasis. When using Google Docs, you actually have multiple options for how to find styles and headers. You can either access these on the main row of formatting options (the same row where you can change your font and text size) or go to “Format” and select “Paragraph Styles.” Though there are many, many options listed in the Styles section, try and keep things simple. The ones I use the most often are “Title” (to signify the title of a particular document), “Heading 1” (main concepts, sections of a document, or a point included in a thesis statement), and “Heading 2” (subpoints and subsections of a document).

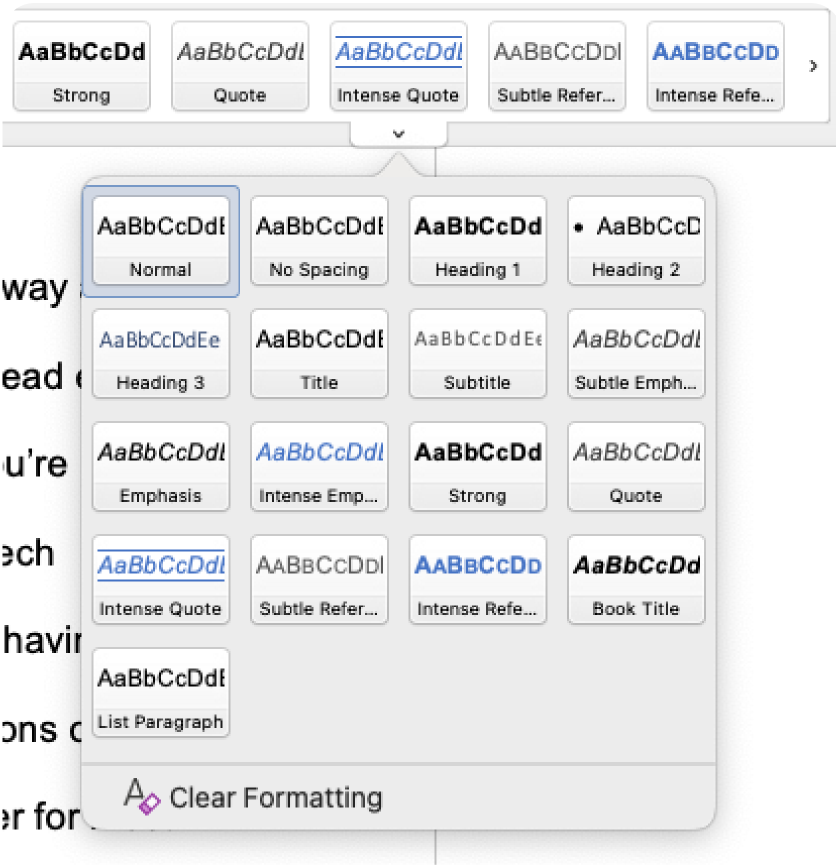


Figure 2. A screenshot of a drop-down menu in Microsoft Word that displays various navigation styles. "Title," "Heading 1," and "Heading 3" are some of the examples listed. Screenshot by author

While these styles and headings are good to use for longer papers, they are also great to include in handouts, manuals, or any other document that has sections in it. (I've even included them in this article.) Even though headings and styles were created as accessibility tools, they can be incredibly helpful for nondisabled readers who are looking for a very specific section of a document or want to, at a glance, determine what sections they should read in detail and which ones they can skim. Headings aren't a hidden accessibility feature like alt text often is, and anyone can (and should) make use of headings and styles in text documents and webpages. In text programs like Microsoft Word and Google Docs, these headings appear in the "Navigation" pane and have a link-like functionality, mean-

ing that when you click a specific heading in the pane, presto! You instantly arrive at that specific section of your document. This feature can be so helpful when writing and reading through larger research projects and all sorts of text documents. Rhetorically speaking, the process of identifying and labeling your main and secondary points once you've finished drafting can help you better visualize your organization. When adding headers and styles, you're essentially creating a reverse outline to check and see if your material is well-organized and to help your reader follow your train of thought. That action can be so helpful if you're not completely sure where a major idea belongs in your paper.

Heading and Styles Tips and Tricks

- Don't add headings and styles until the very end of your writing process, when you're almost finished. Trust me on this one. It's much, much easier to tweak these kinds of settings and create an external structure once the text is nearly completed than to attempt this when you're still drafting or revising.
- Keep your font and emphasis (italics, bold, underlining) as simple as possible. If you don't want to use the font or colors that are provided in the default styles, then you can highlight the text where you want to place the heading, go to the individual heading, right click it, and select "Update Heading to Match Current Selection." This process is relatively similar across document platforms. By doing this, you will have added the necessary structure and avoided altering your font, size, and formatting choices.

Scripts: The Art of a Dramatic Performance

Scenario: You're attending several presentations on first year writing. It's hard for you to process large amounts of spoken language and still retain the ideas, and you've been grateful that other presenters have provided scripts of their presentations so you can follow along. Today's presenters are really Important Researchers, and you're so excited to hear their ideas. Maybe you'll get to meet them afterwards!

When it's time for this presentation to begin, no one offers scripts, even though it was required. You realize that the presenters treated the accessibility guidelines as optional, and are shocked, angry, and discouraged. You've never felt so unwelcome and out of place. The presentation continues, but you can't keep up with the ideas.

This last accessibility measure is, for many people, the odd one out. Creating and using presentation scripts has more do with the class space, your role as a rhetor and presenter, and your awareness and connection to your audience as opposed to simply formatting a document. It's the kind of accessibility that is less objective, more subjective, and therefore more overlooked, but is no less important. Like with alt text and headings and styles, using scripts impacts your audience's ability to connect to a text, but this form of access is more likely to benefit peers and instructors who are invisibly disabled and may have difficulty understanding long stretches of uninterrupted spoken language. It would surprise you to know how many people—some disabled, others not—greatly benefit from having a script to follow along with during a presentation. This list is in no way exhaustive, but English language learners, those who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, or people like me, who simply don't process spoken language as quickly as written text, can have more access as a result.

Wait a minute, I can hear you thinking, *I thought reading a script or off notecards when I give a presentation is a bad thing. Also, isn't it incredibly boring to hear someone read from a paper for ten minutes?* The answer to both is no, or at least not necessarily. I've heard some terrific presentations that just so happened to be scripted, and having a script to follow along with as I watched the presenter speak helped me be more engaged with the material and the person presenting it. I could annotate key ideas, remember concepts better, ask more thoughtful questions, and ultimately retain more information long after the presentation ended. So many of the same public speaking staples you learn in communication classes still apply: you should still alter the tone and inflection of your voice when using a script and regularly make eye contact with your audience. It's still possible to be engaging and make use of your physical presentation space with a script in hand. It just takes a bit more planning, planning that will make your presentation so much better than if you only used a few note cards with bullet points on them. Most importantly, using a script and distributing it to your peers and instructor is an important act of inclusion.

Like alt text and headings and styles, creating presentation scripts to be more accessible to your peers and instructors has some great benefits for you, too. Taking time to carefully think through what I want to say and how to phrase it has multiple advantages. I'm more relaxed and less nervous when I give my presentation because I've thought it through more than just coming up with a few bullet points or throwing something together at the very last minute. I'm prepared in a way that I wouldn't be otherwise. Since I'm going to share my script with someone other than

me, I've had to really concentrate on how to organize, frame, and explain whatever concept I've been working on so others who don't think the same way I do can understand. As a result, my presentations are—not to toot my own horn here—pretty polished because I've taken the time to choose my phrases carefully, to transition well, and to revise and edit my thoughts. All of these steps are steps you take when working on a written project or paper, but by creating a script for a presentation, you can transfer those rhetorical moves to make your presentation better, too.

Scripting Tips and Tricks

- Take advantage of software features. When I'm making a presentation, I use the "Notes" section of PowerPoint to write out my script for each slide. I'll save my PowerPoint in a cloud platform, and tweet out the link and put my Twitter account name on the first slide. That way, those who need a script have an easy and discreet way to read along.
- If you don't want your audience to keep your script, you can copy your script text into a Google Doc, make the file shareable for your presentation and then disable this feature afterwards. (There are plenty of other ways to distribute scripts beyond what I have here—all it takes is a little forethought and planning.)
- Practice reading your script out loud before you present! That's a great revision strategy to help you iron out any bumpy parts of your presentation.

Your Role in the Process: Embracing the Challenge and Creativity of Accessibility

Good writing is all about making choices, and accessibility is one of the most important choices you can make because the choice to be accessible impacts more than just you. It's a responsibility you have not only as a writer, but as a member of a class, a student at a school, and a good citizen. Whenever you create a writing project, you're sending a rhetorical message about who your audience is—instead of your audience being the ambiguous and universal "everyone," it actually is "everyone who can access what you've created." This duty may feel a bit daunting, but do your best to embrace the challenge. One of the great things about accessibility is that it forces you to get outside of your own head, view your world dif-

ferently, and consider how your design choices impact how others interact with your documents. However, this process is not without some learning curves. Access work is a recursive process, one where may you try an accessibility feature or action and it may or may not work as you expected. Some ideas for being accessible may sound good in theory, like giving your classmates and instructor a detailed handout instead of a script, but don't provide real access or an equitable way for everyone to experience your work. In fact, a situation where you provide a handout in lieu of a script is an example of the social model of disability because your choice to not provide equal access to what you say in a presentation is more disabling than any impairment your instructor or peers may have.

Often, being accessible requires you to think creatively and differently, which can be hard. You might even have to go back to the drawing board and start over. This tension is normal, and, like with writing, part of how we learn—sometimes, the path to knowledge and mastery is straightforward, but often it's a "two steps forward, one step back" kind of journey. But I encourage you to resist shortcuts because the journey is worth it, not only in terms of your own learning, but in creating more equity and inclusion for your disabled peers and instructors. When brainstorming accessibility options, it's helpful to avoid looking at access work like problem solving or "fixing" your projects with specific disabilities or people in mind. At best, this way of thinking is overly reductive and at worst treats disabled people like problems and puzzles that are waiting to be solved, which is pretty dehumanizing (Price 101). Instead, I'd encourage you to look at making your writing more accessible like adding more lanes on a highway. The more lanes you add, the more people can get on and drive towards their destination. The more accessibility features you learn about and integrate into your writing, the greater the chances that all readers will be able to experience and interact with your hard work and great ideas.

My hope is that you take the knowledge from this essay and keep learning about ways to be accessible and keep growing. I know some people feel a bit guilty or discouraged when they learn about accessibility for the first time, but I'm reminded of a quote commonly attributed to the great Maya Angelou: "I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better." Working to be more accessible isn't just about creating documents, spaces, and projects for disabled people. It's also about using these documents and moment to rhetorically communicate that your disabled peers, instructors, or wider audience matters and belong. That makes your writing even more powerful.

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Teacher Resources for The Rhetorical Possibilities of Accessibility

This essay is intended as a basic introduction of accessibility and what starting points students can take in becoming more accessible writers and project creators. In my experience, few, if any, students have learned about accessibility and their role in it before reaching college, so my providing information about alt text, headings and styles, and presentation scripts merely lays a foundation. Next steps for continuing this conversation about accessibility can include (but aren't limited to) serif versus sans serif fonts, using color contrast, blending smart design choices with accessibility, and accessible social media practices, including capitalizing each word in multi-word hashtags and creating captions for video posts.

Given that accessibility is applicable to all forms of document creation, this essay could work well as early reading in a course. If assigned early, students have the opportunity to practice this awareness and related skills with each project they create over the course of the semester. With accessibility's relatedness to multiple ways of reading a text and representing information, this essay would also work well in conjunction to other readings and conversations on multimodality (Price 96). The beauty of accessibility is its limitless creativity and universality, so this conversation could really fit anywhere in a course, but for maximum effectiveness, I recommend using it near the beginning of the semester.

As a final note, I talk quite a bit about equity at the end of the essay and it may be worth having a conversation with students about how equity is not synonymous with equality and the differences between the two terms.

Discussion Questions

1. If you use a screen reader, what advice would you give nondisabled writers who are creating accessible documents? Are there other strategies and tools besides alt text, headings and styles, and presentation scripts that you would recommend that writers use?

2. If you don't use a screen reader (and have ready access to JAWS, Dragon, or other screen reading technology on campus), close your eyes and test a website of your choice using screen reading software. How would you describe the experience of listening versus reading

visually? Does using this software make you think of your design choices differently?

3. How does the choice to be accessible when writing connect to the idea of a writer's ethos?
4. Presentations are far from the only circumstances where having a script or visual access to spoken text is helpful. What other circumstances or media could benefit from scripts or captioning?

8 At Work in the Archives: Place-Based Research and Writing

Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Jessica Rose

Overview

This chapter outlines a plan for incorporating primary and archival research into first year writing course designs.* Correlating directly with recent college initiatives and composition best practices, archival research asks students to see themselves as experts, engage in rhetorical activism, and take on college-to-career projects. At its core, writing with archives not only encourages, but insists upon, interdisciplinary topic selection and research. Because all projects focus upon local communities, archive building and assessment, and stakeholders' interests in the collected materials, this pedagogical method organically guides students through traditional rhetorical elements: audience consideration, articulation of the writer's relationship with the subject matter, and blending primary and secondary evidence to craft a convincing (and in many cases, quite passionate) message. This chapter offers students a fundamental understanding of archiving practices and research methods, providing tools that prepare them for interdisciplinary research and writing practices that characterize academic, community, and workplace communication.

What do you imagine when you hear the term "archives"? Do you think of obscure documents or fragile artifacts, dusty attics or damp basements filled with shelves of paper? Although sometimes true, these stereotypes present an incomplete picture of archival work. *Archives* house physical evidence of the past and offer direct links to

community histories. We define archives as both (1) collections of materials related to a person, family, or organization that have continuous social and cultural value, and (2) the places in which these collections are preserved and stored for future use. Many of the materials housed in archives are considered *primary sources*—direct materials created by or around the research topic and uninterpreted by others. Typical primary archival materials include official documents, letters, photographs, and memorabilia. Strong archival research projects blend primary archival research with *secondary research*—the published findings of experts—to produce a comprehensive exploration of a research question.

Archives and archival research have recently enjoyed a renaissance and are recognized as important sources supporting a range of exciting commercial, public, and scholarly projects. Historical novels and genealogy projects, biopic movies and public memorials, human rights marches and copyright law all rely upon archival investigation. Archival research can be highly personal, and projects often stem from the writer/researcher's interests. For example, you might want to learn more about your family's history, a possible career or a hobby, a social movement issue, or a local legend or public figure. You may want to correct a common misconception, bring to light a neglected person or issue, or illustrate how a local event connects to a larger initiative. In these instances where secondary research may be limited, over-interpreted, or missing, archival research can bridge connections and encourage new scholarship. In this chapter, we introduce concepts of archival investigation and provide ideas and suggestions for researching diverse and fascinating archival materials such as monuments, clothing, letters, photographs, and maps.

You will find numerous advantages when writing with archives. Perhaps most importantly, in this research method you choose topics that you really want to investigate. Rarely do two students in a class write about the same issue or collection. Your project is unique, and you immediately become the subject matter expert, given your familiarity with the topic and experiences. As with all projects, archival researchers must double (and sometimes triple) check findings by consulting published sources to corroborate information. However, the artifacts and primary materials you explore, the research questions you formulate, and the experiences and knowledge you bring to a topic ensure that your project is original. In this approach, you are not asked to capture just a snapshot of scholarly ideas addressing a subject, but instead, are encouraged to make new meaning by interpreting a collection of materials or data through your unique perspec-

tive, original interpretation of the material, and personal understanding of people involved.

Within this chapter, we provide guidance for initiating archival research, offer ideas for finding a topic, and discuss issues associated with digital and in-person archival investigation. Because archives are tied to memory, culture, and power, class assignments might introduce study that happens beyond the desktop and library stacks, in places where the research process is determined by the space in which it occurs. We also share anecdotes about writing with archives that demonstrate how you can build an exciting research plan that is at once personal and outward facing.

What Counts as an Archive?

In our current technological moment, where posts, tweets, and even our Internet searches are "archived," understanding exactly what the term *archive* means for academic research is critical. Here, we refer to archives as formal acts of gathering and organizing materials, the collections themselves, and the spaces where preservation occurs. Archival research can take place at a variety of locations, including:

- college and university archives
- corporate archives
- government archives
- historical societies
- museums
- religious archives
- special collections
- community archives
- digital archives

Specific goals govern each of the archives listed above, which determines what materials reside in their repositories as well as collection practices. Understanding how collections are collated (or assembled) can sometimes, although not always, help direct your research process. For instance, examining a government archive for what is missing—what is not present in the archive but seems logical to be included—could be as important as discovering what is available. In defining your research goals, knowledge of these differences will help you decide where materials might live and which repositories to consult.

Through archival research, you become an academic detective. You reconsider what counts as evidence, rethink who can be identified as an expert, and discover how and where historical accounts are generated. Working with primary and archival sources prepares you for community writing and workplace research, where you will likely be asked both to locate information and seek solutions to existing problems. Consider the workplace projects of some of our students who have conducted original investigations in our archival research classes: one student gathered months of data and conducted employee interviews to solve a scheduling problem at the food delivery franchise where he worked. Another student researched blueprints, government documents, and newspaper articles to help determine how best to launch a new business within an existing community. One of our employed students investigated the branding and icon history of the local bank where he worked. Others chose topics closer to home, like the student who researched shifting legislation and tax law to advise her parents about looming changes that would affect their family business. Keep in mind that archival materials can be accessed by visiting physical collections, consulting online websites, or in some cases requesting that digitized holdings to be delivered to you via email or through interlibrary loan.

Archival projects may also be deeply personal and familial. Such projects might include researching an often-told family story, maybe one about immigration, travel, or a birth narrative. These projects often rely upon consulting archival materials such as interviews, family letters and documents, baby books and birth certificates, as well as government records. You might choose to write about personal communities to which you belong—religious, educational, heritage, place, or food. Maybe you want to dig deeper into a personal hobby, which provides a great opportunity to share your passions and expertise with new audiences. Our students have written about a diverse range of topics, including international stamps, NASCAR, vintage wedding dresses, cooking and crafting, conspiracy theories, immigration communities, protest posters, New York's 1970s disco scene, the natural hair movement, and the history of the Appalachian dulcimer. Topic possibilities are limited only by your interests.

Planning Archives-Based Projects

Archival research requires you to arrive at interpretations of events and ideas independently, rather than solely relying on the interpretations of others or published scholarship. In doing this work, you become the expert

on the topics you investigate. However, archival research can initially be confusing for those who are unfamiliar with the process. As you gain experience developing projects that include or prioritize archives, however, the process becomes easier. Archives-based research can be hugely rewarding but requires flexibility and some working knowledge of archival tools. In this section, we introduce those tools and describe ways in which you can prepare for this kind of research.

Topics

Students beginning archival research for the first time often ask, "Where do I begin?" Likely, up to now, your research projects have been assigned and relied heavily upon secondary sources; the published research and claims of experts may have guided both your research process and conclusions. Archival research, however, gives you the chance to choose your own topic, state your own claims, and even make new knowledge based on your research trajectory.

When selecting a topic, begin with subjects that interest you most. Topic ideas can come from a variety of places. In our archival projects, we have investigated historical issues (the history of music copyright and 19th-century women's monuments), current social movements and events (women's marches and health-related artifacts), and labor practices (domestic workers and educators). Your research may be just as varied. Take a moment and think about what interests you personally and academically. Do you have a hobby that you want to explore further; do you want to know more about a community issue; or are you interested in the backstory of a film or book? List three possible research topics, then ask yourself the following questions about each option in order to narrow your focus:

Table 1: Topic Idea Chart

	Is your topic an idea, thing, or place?	**What draws you to it?**	**What is the exigence?**	**What claims can you make?**	**Where can you find more information?**
Topic Idea 1					
Topic Idea 2					
Topic Idea 3					

As you brainstorm, you will find that research paths begin to appear. To demonstrate, let's consider an example: you want to explore the origins of an old family recipe, a source of family pride. Let's say you are interested in learning more about the original version of the recipe, which includes an unfamiliar ingredient, Carolina gold rice. After quickly researching Carolina gold rice, you discover it is an heirloom rice tied to historic Southern coastal culture, which leads you to hypothesize how the recipe and your family might connect. With additional secondary research, you discover that the rice was brought to the Carolinas from West Africa and was important to the history of antebellum commerce and low-country Creole life. With this information, you can now begin searching for archival collections that feature that specific strain of rice or similar recipes to draw further connections. You might also decide to do some genealogical research to locate where recipe originators likely lived, and you will probably develop additional research questions that arise from findings. Regardless of what you discover, you may gain both a better understanding of your family recipe and expertise in the cultural, commercial, and political facets of Lowcountry foodways—all from a family recipe.

Archival Evidence

Archival research always blends traditional secondary research with primary investigation. Archival holdings frequently include documents, artifacts, and ephemera (described below). Documents refer to organized papers that relate to a person or institution and may include office memos, patient records, press releases, accounting ledgers, journals and calendars, and legal papers. Artifacts—physical items—may be related to a donor's life or work and could include items as rare as a lost sketch or as mundane as a collection of protest buttons. Ephemera—an item that is temporary or has a short shelf life—may include documents or artifacts, but what makes them so exciting is that they are accidental. These objects were not necessarily meant to be saved and were important only in the moment; examples include receipts, tickets, and advertisements. Ephemera are often collected as reminders and souvenirs of an event. Given these diverse examples of archival evidence and the information they can provide, we encourage you to rethink what counts as evidence. Consider items you have collected or saved: birthday cards, concert tickets, a diary, a favorite doll. If future researchers encounter your collection of ephemera, what might they deduce about you and the time in which you lived? How might they count your materials as evidence?

In addition to documents, artifacts, and ephemera, many archives also collect oral histories. *Oral histories* include sound recordings and transcriptions of conversations between an archivist or researcher and historical participants and experts. You are probably familiar with the concept of interviewing, a hallmark of journalistic research, in which a reporter asks someone prepared questions on a topic. The oral history format is similarly characterized by question-and-answer conversations though, unlike interviews where information is analyzed and interpreted, oral histories only collect information for posterity. While oral history prompts are designed to gather specific details and information tied to a specific topic, they are much broader in scope, asking the interviewee to recount facts and expound upon memories and experiences. For this reason, oral histories are not merely tools for research but, more importantly, serve to gather and preserve voices of community members, experiences of participants in community events, and memories of witnesses to history.

Oral history interviews take many forms. Interviewers may submit written questions ahead of time to interviewees, who then answer either in writing, in person, or via phone conversations. Depending on the purpose and occasion, accounts also may be gathered on location from witnesses to an event or through legal depositions, for example. Think about ways in which Ken Burns' documentaries ("The Films") and NBC/Ancestry's "Roots Less Traveled" series incorporate oral histories and archival materials, which bring their topics to life for contemporary audiences. However, oral histories are part of a longer oral tradition, recounted in the past by troubadours and travelling storytellers who repeated historical accounts far and wide to ensure they were kept in the public memory. Currently, through the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews, oral histories remain as living artifacts long after the participants pass away or memories of the events discussed begin to fade. If you are researching familial subjects, consider conducting an oral history interview with a family member. Our students have interviewed relatives to learn more about immigration narratives, experiences living in occupied territories during wartimes, and gentrification of neighborhoods. In our research, we have consulted oral histories to learn first-hand about domestic labor unions and women who worked in traditional male occupations. Thorough information about preparing for, conducting, and storing oral histories can be found on the "Best Practices" page of the Oral History Association website.

Special Considerations

As you prepare to work with archives, keep in mind that collected materials are the natural result of human activity and exist within specific cultural circumstances. How we describe, support, and cite archives responds to those contexts.

Archival Description

The process of archival description is important for both archivists and researchers. Because archives have a significant, physical component, the information those materials share is partly physical as well. For archivists, description is "the creation of an accurate representation of the archival material" and is tied to a collection's provenance (the record of ownership) and finding aid (*Describing Archives* xvi). Archivist's in-depth rules of description are uniform across collections, regardless of material or donor. Layered descriptions reveal relationships between the materials and their sources, as well as among other items found in the same collection.

As a researcher, your accurate description of an artifact also reveals the layers and relationships among archival materials and other sources you include in research projects. Beginning your research by creating a description of your source will help you understand what you are examining and help capture small, easy-to-miss details. While an archivist's descriptions are often succinct and summative, research descriptions should be *thick*. The practice of *thick description* is rooted in ethnographic observation and begins with pure description—what can only be observed—and then folds in additional context or interpretation. Let's look at the excerpt below of a thick description from William, a college first-year. This excerpt is the first paragraph of an AIDS Quilt panel he used in his research:

> The quilt block is in total twelve-foot by twelve-foot. There are eight panels in this specific block. The specific panel stands vertically three feet wide by six feet tall. It is in the bottom right corner of the entire block. The block is number 4642 out of the 5956 made, so this block was a later addition to the NAMES Project collection. The panel has a solid black background that feels like a rough cotton fabric. At the top of the panel the name Pedro Zamora is spelled out with gold colored felt in all caps. Just below the name in the same gold felt are the years 1972 on the far-left side and 1994 on the far-right side. Below the year 1972 is a Cuban flag, under the year 1994 is an American flag. Both flags seem to be made out of a vinyl fabric. Pedro Zamora was born in Havana,

> Cuba February 29, 1972 and died November 11, 1994 in Miami, Florida, explaining the Cuban flag under his birth year and American flag under his death year. Below the flags on either side are acting masks and LGBTQ+ pride flags.

William first frames the object he is observing before describing the object's smaller elements. He refrains from adding opinion and context, and keeps his description focused only on what he can see and feel. Several paragraphs later, once William is certain he has captured all the details, he then begins to contextualize his findings:

> Zamora was presented as a very healthy and 'normal' individual that just happened to be living with HIV/AIDS. It was this health and youthfulness that allowed Zamora to reach the younger generation. . . . The panel signifies Zamora's relationship with the public, his family, and his friends. It shows his lasting legacies to the public and how HIV/AIDS impacted him. The panel also shows where he was from and his career occupation with MTV. This panel was created by his close friends and family with help from the people at MTV studios in the wake of his death to HIV/AIDS.

Practice crafting an artifact description. Select a single object and write a detailed objective description--leaving out your assessment or opinions. Then, thicken your description by adding personal, historical or cultural details. Challenge yourself and see how detailed you can be. In writing archival descriptions, try using your senses to flesh out your analysis: How does your object feel? What is its temperature? Does it have a smell? What are its dimensions? What is the condition of the piece? How is it constructed? Once you feel you have exhausted your pure description, contextualize the object: What do you think the object represents? For whom might it have significance (originally and now)? Do some quick research to discover historical and cultural backstories of the artifact.

Triangulating Evidence

"Triangulating evidence," a common research term, means testing or corroborating a study. To ensure the reliability of findings, you need to seek additional sources that verify your claims. For example, a classroom teacher might design a new teaching strategy to help students get better results on timed exams. In addition to creating a control group for testing findings, the instructor may also conduct interviews with student partic-

ipants and ask another teacher to observe the classes and students, as well as comparing the final test scores after the two groups receive results. This validation process is less formulaic in archival research since primary projects can vary widely.

In archival research methods, triangulation seeks to establish validity of findings by consulting multiple accounts of an event obtained from sources, such as individual accounts, public records, community artifacts, corporate records, or private holdings. Think about sources you might use to corroborate, or double- and triple-check findings, for your projects. For example, in archival educational research, you might examine the literary influences of a famous author by starting with the writer's letters or journal entries in which they allude to a reading history or favorite writings. Next steps in determining works from which the author drew inspiration could include consulting printed catalogs, university calendars, or published professor testimonies that discuss the school curriculum where the author studied. To further verify a list of possible early influences, you might find an inventory of the contents of the author's personal library. Collectively, these sources provide an overview of possible works the young artist may have encountered. Citing multiple sources serves to authenticate your claims, particularly when readers don't have direct access to the original artifacts and ephemera that you found and consulted.

Citing Archival Sources

Academic research always requires acknowledging the materials you consult and investigate. The specific guidelines for citing and formatting bibliographical information depends upon your teacher's preference or the adopted guidelines of your discipline (e.g., Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, or Chicago Manual of Style). While you likely are quite familiar with requirements for citing printed materials, such as books, journal articles, and newspapers, documenting archival materials may be new to you. For example, when faced with quoting and citing information found in a file folder contained in a larger box that also houses photographs, letters, and perhaps artifacts such as diaries or military ribbons, how do you begin to cite? Oft-visited reference sources, such as the Purdue OWL and library resources, include information for getting started (see for example "Primary Sources in Archives & Special Collections: Citing Archival Sources"), but in archival documentation, one size doesn't fit all. In recent years, as archival research has become more prevalent, the major style guidelines have revised and improved the citation information for primary sources. Begin with the available information

found in your teacher's recommended style guide, but be aware that citing archival materials may require a bit more attention to detail—both in adequately citing references but also in pointing to the actual content of your sources.

Archival researchers must adopt an extra layer of ethical responsibility, particularly when working with materials that are not published, catalogued, or even available to the public. Adequately citing and documenting a photo album, life events recorded in a family religious volume, or unpublished letters, for example, relies wholly upon the ethical responsibility of the researcher. You must comprehensively describe and catalogue findings, representing not only materials that answer your main research questions, but also information that may contradict your original hypothesis or suppositions. Readers will not have access to these materials and, therefore, cannot double check your findings. Properly citing archival materials not only ensures you represent your research properly, but also responds to the same plagiarism concerns connected with properly citing secondary sources.

One of our students examined a set of letters sent home from a soldier serving in Vietnam. The student wanted to capture the isolation young soldiers experienced during this controversial conflict. Yes, in this private family collection of ephemera, she certainly found evidence to support this initial research question, but our student also discovered within the correspondence that her relative developed a sense of personal responsibility, strong camaraderie with fellow military personnel, and clear ideas of what path he wanted to take upon his return to civilian life. In the final analysis, she had to include all the findings, even the information that refuted/expanded her initial assumption. When conducting archival research, you may find that once you have examined materials, you must adjust research questions and ethically account for the full range of collated materials. This practice serves to strengthen your stance as a reliable researcher and has the added advantage of suggesting new avenues of research and possible topics that your readers might want to pursue—hallmarks of effective scholarly research.

Conclusion

Incorporating archival investigation early in your academic career sets you upon a research and writing path that you will likely follow throughout college, at work, and in your personal life. We find community study and problem solving to be much more engaging than restating what someone

else thinks about an assigned topic, and we hope that archival research serves to increase your awareness of local issues and understandings of people who may be different from yourself.

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Teacher Resources for At Work in the Archives: Place-Based Research and Writing

Overview and Teaching Strategies

Teaching undergraduates to write with archives is rewarding and pedagogically sound. Benefits for students include strengthening critical thinking skills and developing greater awareness of how scholars use sources to make meaning. Archival research has benefits for teachers as well, providing unique opportunities to learn from and alongside your students. While this shift in pedagogical roles may seem a bit alienating initially, we've found engaging in archival research and writing to be quite liberating. Teachers and students worry less about plagiarism and disinterest in assigned topics. Additionally, teachers don't face burnout because each term brings a new set of students with widely divergent interests. Pretty quickly, students take on roles as subject matter experts and begin to see vital connections between their personal lives and academic work. As archival researchers ourselves, we share our experiences working in the archives with our students—stories of serendipity and curiosity, moments of blending our personal interests with rhetorical activism—in ways that invite and encourage students to join ongoing scholarly conversations.

The recent surge in scholar-teacher works dedicated to writing with archives provides good starting places for considering how you might add archival research to existing courses or redesign curriculum to focus on primary research. See, for example, *The Archive as Classroom: Pedagogical Approaches to Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (edited by Katie Comer, et al), an open access collection of scholarly essays, assignments and exercises associated with the *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* (DALN) —a collection of over 7000 distinct oral history narratives. The teacher-authored chapters in this unique digital-born collection address storytelling, globalization, digital composition, building a vertical writing curriculum, allowing research subjects their own voices, literacy sponsorship, research methods, performance, serendipity, and researcher positionality. Jane Greer and Laurie Grohman's *Teaching Writing and Rhetoric at Museums, Memorials, and Archives* likewise offers a collection of articles penned by teachers experienced in designing archival assignments; the contributors address pedagogy affiliated with local, public collections and artifacts. And Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Michelle Eble's *Primary Research and Writ-*

ing: People, Places, and Spaces is a first-year writing textbook completely grounded in archival and primary praxis. (See also works by Bahde, et al; Enoch and VanHaitsma; Graban and Hayden; Hayden; and Daniel-Wariya and Lewis).

Specifically, first year writing classes grounded in archival research:

- ask students to see themselves as experts and share their passion and knowledge;
- avoid plagiarism and patchwork writing;
- blend community writing and service learning with original research effortlessly;
- invite students to research local artifacts, business and government records, and workplace collections;
- introduce students to library investigation in engaging ways—through special collections and with digital materials;
- encourage students to research writing in the disciplines through exploration of oral histories, conducting interviews and surveys, and in analyzing commercial holdings;
- correlate primary research with digital research and writing;
- provide opportunities for students to engage in local rhetorical activism;
- introduce undergraduate students early in their college careers informally to a variety of research methodologies/lenses;
- poise students to examine the ethics of preservation and research;
- explore the implications of researcher credibility and potential claims to speak in community spaces;
- exercise critical thinking skills and bridges the gap between synthesis of knowledge and development of new ideas; and
- stretch students' acumen of the terms "evidence" and "expertise."

Primary and archival research does not dilute traditional research and writing goals. For us, the class goals and outcomes remain the same as in traditional first year writing courses. Students learn to form research questions, evaluate secondary sources, develop rhetorical strategies designed to inform and persuade target audiences, test hypotheses and data, and construct arguments written in convincing prose. Yet, in this approach, they move beyond canned assignments that ask them to engage in patchwork research and writing on topics that may not interest them. Instead, students begin every project by considering their own interests and knowledge—writing as insiders and community members. We have found that

the panicky feeling to get up to speed and say something original about a topic dissipates, drastically reducing plagiarism incidents.

Archivist-teachers reiterate this overview in their disciplinary conversations about the merits of introducing students to working with primary materials, noting that "users who encounter primary sources gain a unique perspective on the subject they are studying," and identifying several "core concepts" students encounter, including:

- analytical concepts, including hypothesis, analysis and critical thinking;
- theoretical concepts surrounding evidence, power, authenticity, materiality, context, and authority;
- ethical concepts around privacy, intellectual property, culture, and copyright; and
- practical skills that reinforce other forms of research and include "finding, accessing, gathering, and handling of materials" in various contexts. (SAA-ACRL/RBMS)

At its heart, writing with archives not only encourages but insists upon interdisciplinary topic selection and research (given the range of student experiences). Because all projects focus upon local communities, questions of archive building and assessment, as well as stakeholders' interests in the collected materials, this pedagogical method inherently and organically guides students through the rhetorical processes of audience consideration, articulation of the writer's relationship with the subject matter, and evidence for crafting a convincing (and in many cases, quite passionate) message. Below, you will find first a list of questions and heuristics that are designed to help students understand the unique nature of archival sources and research methods, to take on the role of expert investigator, and to get started selecting topics to investigate. Next, we offer several sample assignments that you can easily adapt for different locales, to accommodate available physical and digital collections, to adjust for students' level of expertise, and to encourage integration of primary and secondary research. These assignments may be scaffolded in courses completely grounded in archival investigation or adopted within traditional first year writing standard curriculum as stand-alone projects.

Discussion Questions

1. Archival research asks us to look at a wide variety of resources both to glean topic ideas and to shed light on local topics. In what ways might we appropriate everyday spaces, places, and artifacts as sites for archival and communal investigation? Make a list of communities to which you belong (or perhaps, groups you wish to join). What materials, places, and knowledge could you analyze and discuss to make others better aware of that local community? Keep in mind that archivists expand notions of "text" to include a wide list of materials such as letters, pictures, clothing, monuments, government documents, meeting records, and physical artifacts.

2. While most people conjure up physical spaces when imagining the possibilities for conducting archival research, digital archives offer an accessible and reliable way to investigate community topics as well—and provide an excellent and inexpensive way to begin archival exploration given the nature of finding aids and the increased number of digitized collections. What are the advantages and limitations of examining archival materials online for your specific topic? How might you blend traditional research methods and digital archival investigation to expand the efficacy of your investigation and to corroborate findings?

3. How does your "positionality" or relationship with materials and communities you choose to research influence the ways you interpret and report findings? Before taking on a project, think carefully about why you want to research this event, community or set of artifacts. What is your goal, and who is your audience? How will you respond to found materials that don't fit your hypothesis or perceived ideas about a community?

4. How does "presentism" —your own cultural practices and twenty-fist century perspective —influence your readings of historical events? Relatedly, in crossing cultural, racial, political, and gendered borders, in what ways do we need to take care—particularly in terms of representation of groups to which we don't belong?

5. Archival and primary research never works in isolation from traditional secondary investigation. Whether engaged in historical, community event, or workplace inquiry, researchers must rely

upon secondary research to contextualize research topics, corroborate findings, and test solutions and claims. After you have initially examined physical or digital collections, make a list of secondary sources and agencies whose findings will help locate the materials you've found and provide a backstory of the communities you are studying.

6. Findings in archival research can easily be adapted for multiple audiences. In your past writing course(s), you have likely been asked to tell the story of your research findings and experiences from a traditional perspective or in an academic genre. Begin now to think about ways you can adapt your findings for members of the community you are studying, for community outsiders or readers who may know nothing about the subject matter. To community stakeholders or to those with the power or abilities to answer a call to action? For public, civic, or corporate audiences? Does shifting the lens make writing easier for you, attract listeners outside your (perhaps) shallow initial target audience pool, or suggest additional venues for delivering your findings? In archival research, the audience is never just your teacher.

Getting Started Writing Prompts

1. Make a list of research projects you have produced in the past. Identify differences and similarities among each type of research method found in those papers. What steps did you need to take to prepare? Could any of those topics be revisited through the lens of archival investigation? If so, draft a revision plan that incorporates archival research methods.

2. As a thought experiment, how might you build an archival collection? (You can take pieces from existing collections.) What would you include in your archive and why? What is the significance of the materials? How are the items related? Justify where your collection should be housed.

3. In the "Archival Description" section, we ask you to describe a personal object. What did you count as "evidence" and "information?" Cite at least two examples of how you might triangulate claims about the object.

4. Look at the JFK Oral Histories collections and select an oral history to investigate ("Oral Histories"). Listen to the first 25 minutes of the oral history and make notes about the covered topics. List names of people the interviewee mentions, biographical data, and other items of interest. Write a paragraph that summarizes your observations and concludes with one research question.

Activities

The following activities introduce concepts, skills, and frameworks associated with archival investigation. These scaffolded assignments are designed to support skills-building, culminating in a final project. Assignments echo and reinforce primary research skills across the course curriculum. However, teachers who wish to incorporate archival investigation as one tenet of a writing course may find these exercises useful for introducing primary research into the curriculum and broadening students' understanding of what counts as a text, the relationship between sources and communities, and the role of the researcher.

Site Visit

One way to introduce students to archival research is to schedule a class visit to a local collection. Many institutional libraries will provide a guided tour of special collection holdings. Following this group visit, then ask students to begin thinking about a specific collection they might like to visit individually. They can research the target site online to gain an initial understanding of what resources might be available locally or call a reference librarian or curator to learn more about research opportunities. Then ask students to turn in a preliminary memo stating the proposed location they plan to visit, strategies for gaining admission, plan of study, and research questions. You will likely need to make time early in the term to consult individually with students about their project interests and possible local sources. The time spent early in the term in 1:1 consultation pays big dividends later in the semester; students leave these early meetings focused and excited. Following the site visit, students turn in a follow-up report, describing and detailing what they found in the archive and exhibiting more fully developed research questions based on available materials.

Ethnographic Assignment

This assignment asks students to describe research sites, noting details such as colors, weather, physical space layout, artifacts, as well as partici-

pants' appearances and body language, and actions, etc. Field notes are the essence of any observational project, and for this assignment, you can ask students to conduct two (2) site observations, turning in both observational field notes and their narrative/analytical reflections on their observations. After they demonstrate observation and transcription skills, students can next explore interpretative techniques, such as coding and analysis, and then draw conclusions from the patterns they find. The students' field notes become a primary source for determining research questions. For a robust discussion of observation techniques, we recommend consulting Dana Driscoll's "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews," featured in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2.

Interview

Oral histories lie at the heart of many archival projects. You can ask your students to listen to digitized oral histories to become familiar with this format, instructing them how to read transcripts and listen to recordings with their research questions in mind. Depending on their research interests, we next ask students to conduct a short interview with a "person of interest" —archivist, researcher, community member, event organizer, or expert. This exercise can serve multiple functions, such as: introduce students to new communities, provide a first-hand account of a local event, corroborate archival findings, or contextualize information. Students often include information gleaned from the interviews in their final papers—and sometimes they invite the interviewee to attend the final project presentation event (described below).

Digital Archives Analysis

Increasingly, historical and current materials are digitized, granting wider access to a wealth of materials. Additionally, many student projects may rely on government documents, community archives, and workplace information that is now readily available online. Ask students to first provide a thick description of the digital archive and then to outline their plan or methods for incorporating this material into their project, stipulating the limitations of this online collection and identifying needed supplementary secondary sources to contextualize what they find within cultural, educational, historical, or political contexts. Finally, students can list emerging research questions prompted by the collection, answering how they will

use the discovered information to support a claim, illustrate a point, or shed light on an existing problem.

Final Project

Discuss possible project formats with students during the first two weeks of the class. As in prior assignments, students submit memos for end-of-semester work, which may include a culmination/synthesis of the term's research. In classes grounded in archival research, final projects may take many different forms, including finding aids (for uncatalogued materials), commonplace books (for collecting and connecting related materials addressing a narrow subject), mapping projects (associated with ethnographic observation and community investigation), and artifact analysis—in addition to traditional research papers. These final assignments all include written project justifications, research narratives, and reflections about their experiences working in the archives. Students "write up" findings in the format appropriate for interested communities

Presentation of Final Projects

At the end of the term, consider planning a symposium where students present their final projects in a poster board session, discussion panel, conference talk, paper, or other genre as appropriate to the project. We've had great success inviting other teachers and students from the department to the event, as well as community participants who contributed to the projects.

9 What's That Supposed to Mean? Using Feedback on Your Writing

Jillian Grauman

Overview

Providing feedback to students is one of the most challenging parts of a composition instructor's job (Caswell; Straub, *Practice*), and making use of that feedback (whether provided by a professor, tutor, or classmate) is just as challenging for students.* While research has shown that students prefer feedback that helps them to revise some substantial part of their paper (Haswell; Lizzio and Wilson), they don't always receive this kind of feedback—and even when they do, many students still tend to have a difficult time making revisions. This chapter 1) helps students understand that having difficulty using and interpreting feedback is normal—that using feedback successfully is actually a learned skill—and 2) presents recommendations students can tailor to their own contexts and goals. It includes four major sections: a personal narrative, an overview of typical challenges, recommendations for using feedback, and student revision examples.

As an early college writer, you have already received lots of feedback on your writing—from high school teachers, college professors, peers, writing tutors. And you already know that you're supposed to read and use that feedback. But it's likely that at least some of the time, you looked through your feedback and felt confused. And it's also likely that at some point the feedback you received hurt your feelings. Maybe the feedback made you feel like a failure. Maybe that feedback confirmed

all the things you've been telling yourself about your abilities as a writer: "Nope, I'm just bad at this." Maybe for those reasons, you don't look very carefully at your feedback—maybe you don't look at it at all. We all know that reviewing your feedback on your writing is supposed to help you get better, but… how? What exactly are you supposed to do with all that feedback you get on your writing? Especially when that feedback can be hard to implement, frustrating, or hurtful?

I can confidently say that the scenarios I outlined above are pretty common not only because research tells us about them (Babb and Corbett; Batt; Dohrer; Ferris; Haswell; Lizzio and Wilson; Straub *Practice*; Straub "Students' Reactions"), but also because I experienced those kinds of things myself as a student.

During my first semester of college, I was excited to get my first college paper back from my professor. I sat patiently at my desk, waiting for my professor to finish handing out our essays. As a high school student, English had always been my favorite subject and my papers had received good grades with few or no comments. When my professor finally handed my paper back, I eagerly turned my paper over, ready to bask in my success. Instead, at the top of the page, I saw a B- written in bright red pen. A B-? Not even a B, but a B-? Feeling totally deflated, I didn't read any further. I stuffed the essay in my backpack, where it crumpled down to eventually form a clump with other unwanted scraps of paper.

I completely ignored the feedback I received on my very first college essay—an unfortunate decision since feedback is perhaps the most powerful tool for improving as a writer. When taken seriously, feedback can help you to think metacognitively—to think about your own thinking. Composition scholar Howard Tinberg argues that "it is metacognition that endows writers with a certain control over their work, regardless of the situation in which they operate" (76). For example, when your feedback makes you reconsider the way you organized your essay ("Why *did* I put that idea there?"), you are ultimately building the skills you'll need to not only revise the paper in front of you, but also to write more effectively in the future; you'll be better able to transfer your learning into different writing situations.

This chapter is meant to offer you the information and advice I needed as a college student struggling to use my feedback. I'll go over common challenges with using feedback, recommend steps you can follow to make good use of your feedback, and showcase examples of how real students used their feedback to revise.

Typical Challenges

There are a number of reasons why people have a hard time using feedback on their writing. In this section, I overview typical challenges and how to move past them. The challenges I focus on here are:

1. seeing writing ability as an unchangeable character trait
2. deciphering your feedback
3. deciding whether you have to or should take actions recommended in your feedback

Challenge 1: Seeing Writing Ability as an Unchangeable Character Trait

In the story I told in the introduction, I saw my writing ability as an inherent and unchangeable part of who I was. This kind of thinking is what Carol Dweck calls a "fixed mindset," which is when you "[believe] that your qualities are carved in stone" (6). If you think your writing ability is "carved in stone" or unchangeable, then what incentive is there for looking through your feedback?

Instead, we should have a "growth mindset" toward our abilities to write, a mindset that measures success by our ability to grow and isn't steeped in fear of how many mistakes we make (Dweck 17). Essentially, if you understand that you're not an inherently good or bad writer, but instead a writer who can improve, all of a sudden, the feedback you receive becomes a valuable tool. Composition scholar Shirley Rose emphasizes this point: no matter who you are, "all writers always have more to learn about writing" (59). Even expert writers have to learn and grow as they adapt their writing for new audiences, purposes, and constraints. By seeing ourselves as ever-growing writers, we can embrace revision as an essential part of our learning process and acknowledge that we need practice to improve (Downs 66; Yancey 63). Feedback on our writing is essential to that process.

To craft your own growth mindset, try this strategy recommended by education researcher Saundra Yancy McGuire. Think of a challenge that you have overcome in the past—any challenge at all. Whether it was learning to ice skate, bake sourdough bread, or create a resume, all of these tasks may have seemed out of reach, but with time and practice got easier, right? The same thing is true for academic challenges, like writing papers.

If you've improved before, you can do it again. Remind yourself of your past successes!

Challenge 2: Deciphering Your Feedback

Feedback should help you grow as a writer. But how exactly you're supposed to grow can be ambiguous—if not totally confusing. It can be difficult to make sense of all the different comments you may get and what they are saying. Luckily, comments on writing tend to fall into some broad categories, and if you can figure out what kind of comment you have, then you can figure out what to do with it. We'll discuss different *forms* of feedback first and then the *content* of your feedback.

Forms of Feedback

The feedback you get on your writing can take a lot of different forms. Depending on the situation, you may get verbal feedback accompanied by some notes from a writing tutor, a screen recording of your professor reading through your paper and verbalizing their thoughts, written comments in the margins of your draft from a peer reviewer, or anything in between. No matter the mode of feedback though, your feedback is going to generally be either "local" or "global." According to Richard Straub, local feedback focuses on a specific part of your paper, topics like grammar or mechanics ("Students' Reactions"). Global feedback focuses on aspects of your writing that impact the entire paper, like your organization or idea development.

When you receive written feedback on your writing, it may take the following forms:

1. In-text or marginal comments: Found in the margins of your paper, this kind of feedback is typically brief and may focus on local or global issues.

2. End note or terminal comments: Found at the very beginning or end of the draft (or accompanying it), this kind of feedback is typically written as a letter to the author and tends to focus on global issues.

3. Rubric: Found at the very beginning or end of the draft (or accompanying it), this kind of feedback evaluates how well you achieved the assignment criteria and tends to focus on global issues.

The form of the feedback indicates what you may need to do with it, but we also need to understand the content of your feedback.

Content of Feedback

Sometimes feedback is confusing or overwhelming because we're just not sure about its purpose. Thankfully, Summer Smith broke down the purposes of comments into three general categories: comments that *judge* some aspect of your writing, *coach* you on some aspect of your writing, and *react* to the paper. We should probably add an *other* category, comments that are too confusing or vague to decipher. Once you get a handle on the purpose of your comments, you can make better decisions about what to do with them.

Judging Comments

Judging comments are an assessment of how well you are doing a particular thing. That assessment can be positive (praise) or negative (criticism). Below is an example of both a positive and negative judgment.

- Positive: This is a concise thesis statement that clearly shows the purpose of your letter.
- Negative: This transition is confusing.

You can see another example of what a positive judgment looks like from an actual student paper in figure 1.

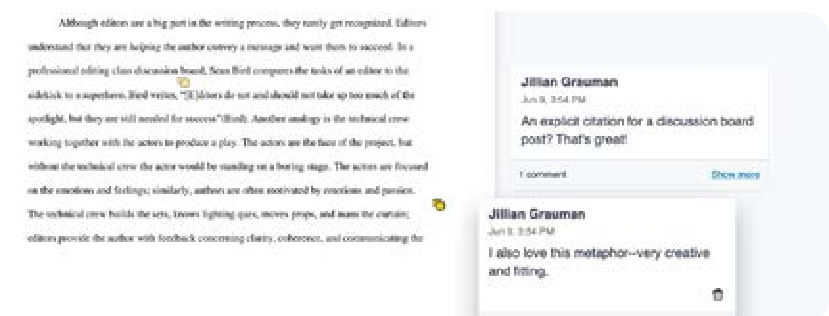


Figure 1. Image of Nicole's paper with an example of a judging comment from the instructor in the right-hand margin. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

You may think of praise as a waste of time ("Just tell me what to do!"), but it is helpful for learning where your strengths lie—and intentionally

replicating that success elsewhere. If you've got a negative judgment, or critique, you know there's at least one thing you may want to revise. If, like in the bulleted example above, the comment notes a confusing transition, that may encourage you to reconsider how your different ideas fit together.

Coaching Comments

Coaching comments offer suggestions. Research (Haswell; Lizzio and Wilson) tells us that students most prefer this feedback because it helps with making immediate changes to a paper. Below are examples of coaching comments:

- Suggestions: Use paragraphs to better sequence and group the information for the reader.
- Questions: Why talk about Snapchat now?

You can see another example of what a coaching comment looks like from an actual student paper in figure 2.

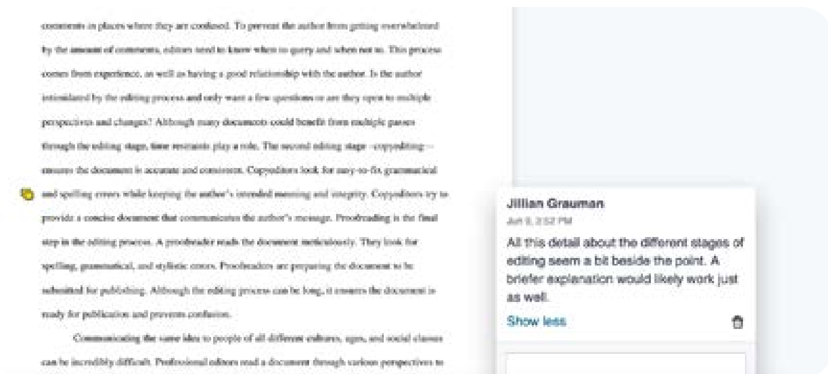


Figure 2. Nicole's paper with an example of a coaching comment from the instructor in the margin. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

Sometimes coaching comments are written indirectly, as questions. These questions may feel frustrating since they don't usually come with instructions, but an important thing that questions do is keep *you* in charge of your writing. Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch explain that students have a right to compose their work as they wish, so your reviewer is not presuming to know what to do best, but instead leaving that decision to you, the author (158).

Reacting Comments

Reacting comments explain your reviewer's understanding of the paper or reactions to your writing. Here are some examples:

- Explaining understanding of the paper: I thought this paragraph was focusing on the typical audience of this genre, but now we have this new idea.
- Offering personal connection: Wow—starting middle school in the US while learning English is impressive.

Find another example of a reacting comment from an actual student paper in figure 3.

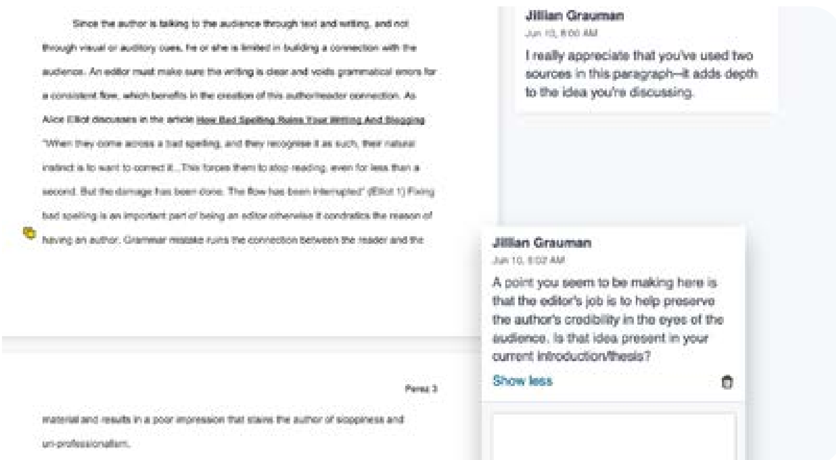


Figure 3. Yonik's paper with an example of a reacting comment from the instructor. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

When you encounter comments that explain the reader's understanding of the paper, you may be inclined to shrug your shoulders and say, "Ok, whatever—moving on!" But don't do it! These are some of the most helpful bits of feedback you can receive on your writing because they give you a window into your readers' thoughts as they were reading. If, as in the example above, the reader noted something they thought was unexpected, you can consider the impact you wanted your writing to have and whether it aligns with this reaction. If it's not, you will need to revise accordingly.

Other Comments

Finally, we come to *other* comments, comments that are too vague or confusing to understand. Here are a couple examples of *other* comments:

- ?
- Awk

While it is tempting to just ignore these comments, follow up with them instead! It's possible that these comments might make you feel sheepish. "Well, I'm *supposed* to know what this means, but I don't, so there must be something wrong with me." That is not the case. Sometimes reviewer feedback can just miss the mark, so there's nothing wrong with asking questions about your feedback. Ask your reviewer what they meant and have a conversation about the implications. For example, if that lone question mark in the margins was meant to indicate confusion, ask what the reader found confusing. If you're not able to approach your reviewer, take your work to the writing center. They can help you decipher unclear comments (and offer their own helpful feedback).

Challenge 3: Deciding Whether You Have to or Should Take Recommendations in Your Feedback

Another set of challenges has to do with acting on the feedback you get. Consider this scenario: You leave peer review with one partner saying that you did a great job on your thesis statement and the other partner telling you that your thesis statement could be clearer. What do you do? Or this one: Your professor suggested that you consider reorganizing your paper and developing one of your main points further. That sounds hard—and you're not so sure about developing that idea further. You didn't think it was all that important to your paper. Do you have to make all those changes? Should you? Underpinning the questions about these scenarios is an important fact: *you are the author of your work, so you get to make the final call.* No matter where your feedback comes from, you need to make your own decisions about what the best action is.

Some people go into revision thinking that writing is completely subjective. "There are no rules here, so I'll just do whatever the professor tells me to do." In this way of thinking, all feedback authors are equally random, but some are more powerful than others (professors > peers), so you just go along to get along. However, writing isn't random, and writing just to please your reviewer isn't going to help you develop your writing skills. Your feedback may have felt random in the past because your reviewers

made different assumptions about your intentions—and while your professor is an expert on effective writing, your professor is not automatically an expert on what you were trying to get across. Back in 1982, Brannon and Knoblauch argued that when providing feedback, professors should ensure that they value students' intentions in their writing and not assume they know what the student was trying to do. In other words, you have the right to control your own text.

You don't need to take all suggestions offered to you—especially if they run counter to your goals. Rather, you need to decide whether the suggestions align with what you want to accomplish. If it seems like your aims didn't come through, *that* is what you should be revising—not advice based on misunderstanding your intentions, even if that feedback came from your professor! Feedback with specific suggestions can be helpful, but you can't simply follow a reviewer's list of suggestions and be good to go. Instead, you need to decide what the best plan is for your intentions in your paper. Rather than taking a suggestion at its word, use it to get a better understanding of how others saw your writing, which can tell you how successful you were. *That* is the kind of feedback you can do tons with.

Recommendations

So now that we have a better understanding of common challenges with using feedback, let's tackle how to use that feedback. The next time you get feedback on your writing, try out the following steps to help you figure out what to do and how to do it:

1. set your own goals
2. review the feedback
3. acknowledge emotional responses
4. develop follow-up questions
5. act on your goals

1. Set Your Own Goals

Before you even start working with your feedback, consider what you want to do with it. It may be tempting to just say, "Well, I just want to make my paper better," but keep in mind that growth mindset concept from earlier. One way to develop a growth mindset and see yourself as a writer who

always has more to learn is to reflect on what *you* want to learn from the feedback, to establish your own intentions. Debra Myhill and Susan Jones argue that this kind of reflective thinking is essential to effective revision. Taking a moment to set your own goals is an example of the kind of meta-cognitive, reflective thinking that will help you transfer your learning to different writing situations.

A key part of setting your own goals is to, of course, review your paper. Take some time to read your draft (without any comments) to remind yourself of what you actually said and did. With your paper fresh in your mind you can then, as Sandra Giles recommends, consider what your intentions were with the paper (198). Were you trying to persuade, define, or analyze? How effective do you think you were? You can also consider which parts of your essay you were most concerned about others reviewing and set a goal related to that. Keeping in mind that the type of paper you're writing and the part of the semester you're in should matter, goals might look like the following:

- I want to find out if my reviewer was persuaded by my argument and make my argument more compelling.
- I want to make my paper more interesting, especially my introduction.

You could set many different goals for reviewing your feedback, but the most important thing is that the goals matter to you!

2. Review the Feedback

We learned earlier that your feedback may come in many different forms, but no matter how your reviewer provided it, first make sure that you can find and access that feedback. If you're not sure where it is or how to get to it, find out as soon as possible. You have my full permission (and urging!) to stop reading this right now so you can figure that out!

Once you've got the feedback in front of you, make sure that you go through *all* of it. Start with any in-text comments. Because these are usually written in response to specific questions or observations the reader had as they were reading through your work, those comments tend to make the most sense if read in context with your paper, so be sure to read your writing around in-text comments. After that, read your end note and rubric.

As you go through all that feedback, take notes and go slowly enough to give yourself time to think. If you have written feedback, consider reading it out loud (or just mouthing the feedback if you feel awkward about talking to yourself) to get yourself to slow down. If your feedback is an

audio file or a video, see if your player will let you play it at a reduced rate—try 0.75 speed rather than full speed. Take notes in whatever way works best for you. This could mean marking up your paper with your own comments, typing replies to the comments, writing on a separate sheet of paper, or whatever works for you. Mark any comments that you found confusing or you want to act on later. I also recommend keeping a list of things your reviewer noted that you did well—knowing your strengths is just as powerful as knowing where you can improve.

3. Acknowledge Emotional Responses

Reviewing your feedback can elicit emotional responses—this is totally normal, and your feelings are legitimate! Reviewing your feedback may elicit positive emotions, like feeling proud of yourself, but it can also elicit negative ones, like feeling misunderstood or discouraged. Dana Ferris found that previous experiences with writing in school, whether good or bad, were linked to students' experiences with professor feedback (25). If you've gotten hurtful feedback before, it's normal for that feedback to stick with you and color experiences with your current feedback.

Whatever you feel, acknowledge those emotions and note which bits of feedback elicited the strongest emotions. Take a moment to ask yourself why that comment had an impact on you and consider how you want to move forward. For example, if you're feeling upset about a comment because it shows that the reviewer misunderstood you, consider following up with the reviewer. If a comment made you feel great about your future writing potential, maybe you should tell your reviewer that! If a comment was hurtful, that also may be worth telling the reviewer, depending on how comfortable you feel with that. Or maybe you don't need to do anything more than simply acknowledge what you're feeling and move on from there.

4. Develop Follow-Up Questions

Once you've reviewed your paper, considered your feedback, and taken some notes, it's time to develop follow-up questions. These questions should help you:

- Figure out what the comment means
- Clarify what, if anything, should be done in response to the comment
- Explain your intentions and see if knowing that would change the comment

It may be that you'll actually take these questions back to the reviewer, but it could just as well be that these questions will only be for you. For feedback that you found confusing, the original reviewer could be helpful in figuring out what to do next. However, if it's not possible to do this or you don't feel ready to talk to the reviewer, these questions are also great to take to a writing center appointment.

5. Act on Your Goals

Now comes the hardest part—acting on your goals! This may feel overwhelming and challenging. After all, the same researchers who help us understand which comments students most prefer (Haswell; Lizzio and Wilson) also explain that students have a difficult time working with their comments—you're not alone in finding this step difficult! However, Nancy Sommers, a composition researcher, explains that all revision is basically one of four specific actions: adding, deleting, replacing, and reorganizing (380). No matter how complex or challenging a revision might be, it will ultimately come down to deciding what you need to add, take out, replace with something else, or move around—not so bad.

That being said, Sommers also found that student writers tend to think about revision as just swapping out words and cleaning up errors, so they tended to mostly delete and replace small portions of their work, focusing mostly on local revisions (382). There is nothing wrong with making sure local revisions are taken care of, but when Sommers compared students to experienced writers (people who had written a lot before and wrote as part of their job), she found that the experienced writers used all four revision strategies and focused on big-picture (i.e., global) revisions (386).

In your revision, I encourage you to treat your work the same as these experienced writers did by focusing on global revisions first and trying to make use of all four revision strategies. Use your feedback for guidance on the development of your ideas and how well your organization works. Are there any new ideas that you need to add or develop further? Any ideas or evidence that should be moved? For example, you might look for places where you were offered feedback that shows the reviewer didn't understand what you were trying to do—is there something you can add or clarify to get your intentions across more clearly? Perhaps you notice that several bits of feedback were about organizational changes—that might indicate you could work on reorganizing or restructuring your body paragraphs, a change that would impact a large chunk of the paper. Once you've worked on big-picture issues, return to those local issues. When you're done revis-

ing, use your feedback as a means of checking over your work. Have you addressed all the concerns that you needed to?

Student Revision Examples

So, what can revision actually look like in practice? Let's look at how two students, Nicole and Lauren, worked with feedback that they received during a peer review. Both students were tasked with writing a paper that defined and described what a good editor should do. Before their peer review, I asked all authors to describe their concerns and what their reviewers should focus on when providing feedback.

Nicole

In Nicole's overview of her own work for peer review, she said that she wanted to work on her introduction and conclusion. She wrote, "Introductions and conclusion are not my strongest area, I would love suggestions on how to make them better."

Here's Nicole's original introduction paragraph:

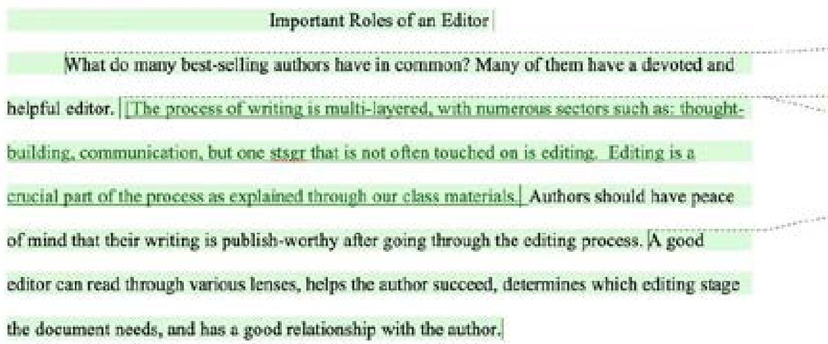
Important Roles of an Editor

What do many best-selling authors have in common? Many of them have a devoted and helpful editor. Writing is a process and editing is a crucial part of the process. Authors should have peace of mind that their writing is publish-worthy after going through the editing process. A good editor can read through various lenses, helps the author succeed, determines which editing stage the document needs, and has a good relationship with the author.

Figure 4. Screen capture of the introduction paragraph from Nicole's initial draft. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

As you can see, it's relatively short, and a bit off-focus since much of this paragraph is focused on what authors do, rather than what editors should do. We can also see that she has a thesis statement at the end of this paragraph.

Yonik, one of Nicole's peer review partners, took Nicole's concern about her introduction seriously enough to offer some notes on it. Here's what Yonik had to say:



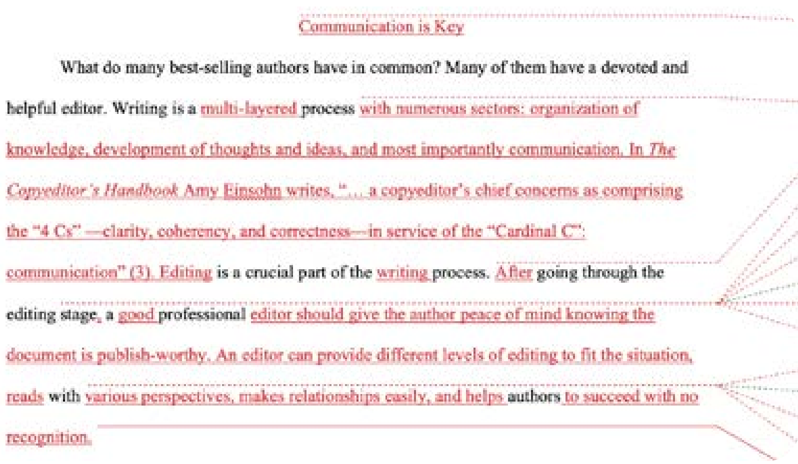
Important Roles of an Editor

What do many best-selling authors have in common? Many of them have a devoted and helpful editor. [The process of writing is multi-layered, with numerous sectors such as: thought-building, communication, but one stsgr that is not often touched on is editing. Editing is a crucial part of the process as explained through our class materials. Authors should have peace of mind that their writing is publish-worthy after going through the editing process. A good editor can read through various lenses, helps the author succeed, determines which editing stage the document needs, and has a good relationship with the author.

Figure 5. Screen capture of Nicole's introduction paragraph with Yonik's comments and suggestions in the right-hand margin. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

His first in-text comment is a judgement—a positive one. He praises Nicole's choice of starting off the paper with a quotation and offers a bit of reassurance by stating that she might be overly negative about her introduction. He later reinforces that positive judgment by noting that the thesis is clear. In the middle of the paragraph, Yonik suggests an idea for expanding on the idea of what editing does. His suggested language includes a reference to materials from the class—a solid suggestion since this assignment required students to include references to class readings and discussions.

The following shows Nicole's revisions to her original introduction paragraph—what she ultimately submitted as the final draft. The underlined text indicates additions or replacements she made to her peer review draft:



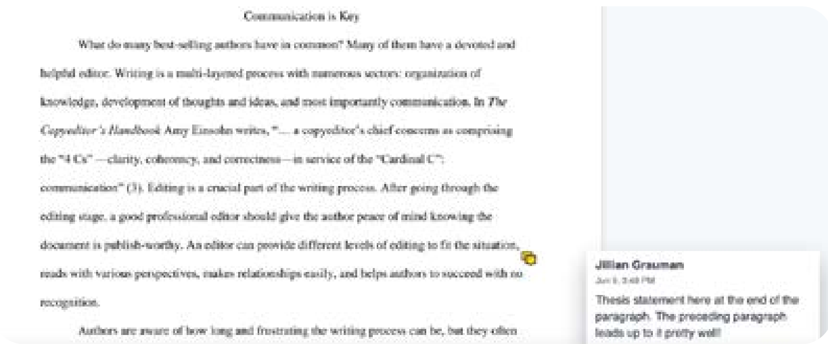
Communication is Key

What do many best-selling authors have in common? Many of them have a devoted and helpful editor. Writing is a multi-layered process with numerous sectors: organization of knowledge, development of thoughts and ideas, and most importantly communication. In *The Copyeditor's Handbook* Amy Einsohn writes, "... a copyeditor's chief concerns as comprising the "4 Cs" —clarity, coherency, and correctness—in service of the "Cardinal C": communication" (3). Editing is a crucial part of the writing process. After going through the editing stage, a good professional editor should give the author peace of mind knowing the document is publish-worthy. An editor can provide different levels of editing to fit the situation, reads with various perspectives, makes relationships easily, and helps authors to succeed with no recognition.

Figure 6. Screen capture of Nicole's revised introduction paragraph with changes indicated by underlined text. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

You can see that Nicole followed her own instincts by making a number of changes to the introduction, despite Yonik's assurances that it was all right. Nicole did take some of his other advice though. She used some of Yonik's suggested language and took his suggestion to reference work we read in the class.

And finally, below shows my response to Nicole's introduction in her final draft:



Communication is Key

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Authors are aware of how long and frustrating the writing process can be, but they often

Jillian Grauman

Thesis statement here at the end of the paragraph. The preceding paragraph leads up to it pretty well!

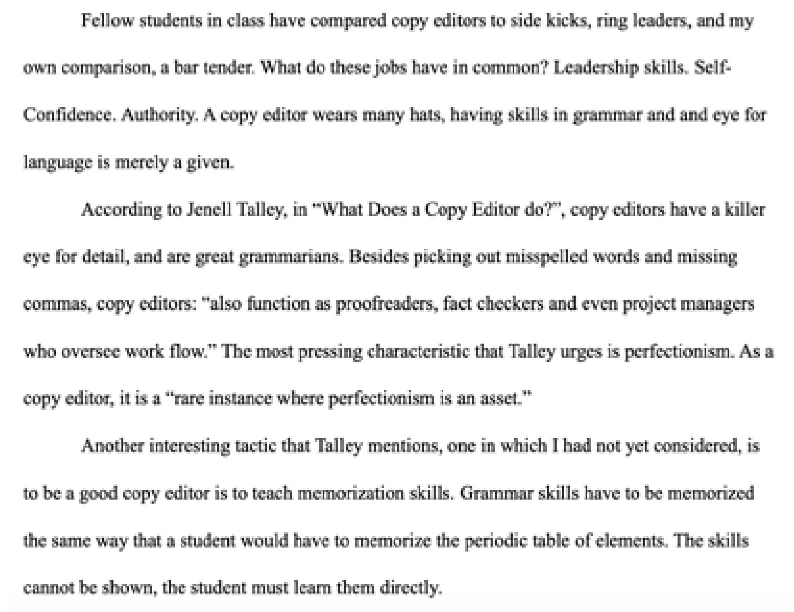
Figure 7. Screen capture of Nicole's introduction paragraph with a comment from the instructor in the right-hand margin. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

I wrote a reacting comment, a comment that shows how I was understanding her writing, by identifying where the thesis statement is. My intention is to help Nicole check herself against my reading; she can see whether or not I identified her thesis correctly and act accordingly. The second sentence is a positive judgement, recognizing that the previous paragraph does a good job of preparing the reader for that thesis.

Nicole's work here shows a positive revision trajectory. She started with a draft that received a mix of positive feedback and revision suggestions, and Nicole thoughtfully incorporated the feedback. She trusted her own judgement, made her own revisions, and ultimately ended up with a more developed introduction that better fit the assignment requirements and her own purposes.

Lauren

During her peer review for the same paper, Lauren assessed her work as "half-done and super choppy," (a perfectly fine way to go into peer review, by the way!) so she needed to work on idea development and organization. Here's the first part of her peer review draft.



Fellow students in class have compared copy editors to side kicks, ring leaders, and my own comparison, a bar tender. What do these jobs have in common? Leadership skills. Self-Confidence. Authority. A copy editor wears many hats, having skills in grammar and and eye for language is merely a given.

According to Jenell Talley, in "What Does a Copy Editor do?", copy editors have a killer eye for detail, and are great grammarians. Besides picking out misspelled words and missing commas, copy editors: "also function as proofreaders, fact checkers and even project managers who oversee work flow." The most pressing characteristic that Talley urges is perfectionism. As a copy editor, it is a "rare instance where perfectionism is an asset."

Another interesting tactic that Talley mentions, one in which I had not yet considered, is to be a good copy editor is to teach memorization skills. Grammar skills have to be memorized the same way that a student would have to memorize the periodic table of elements. The skills cannot be shown, the student must learn them directly.

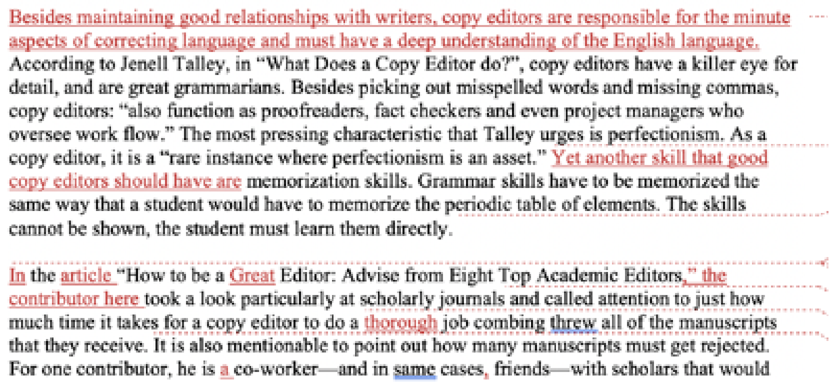
Figure 8. Screen capture of three paragraphs from Lauren's peer review draft. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

You can see some of that choppiness between the second and third paragraphs; she moves straight from discussing one source into the next without much of a connection.

During peer review, Nicole took note of Lauren's concern about the choppiness of the paper. In her end note to Lauren, she wrote:

> You also mentioned that it was choppy. I didn't want to overload the document with comments, so I wanted to say a few general things that might help! When I am writing my own papers, I like to relate the first and last sentences to the prompt/thesis. Also using transitional phrases at the beginning of a paragraph helps me.

Lauren's final version of the document looks quite different from the original. She added more ideas throughout, and she also worked to smooth out the transitions between the paragraphs, as Nicole suggested.

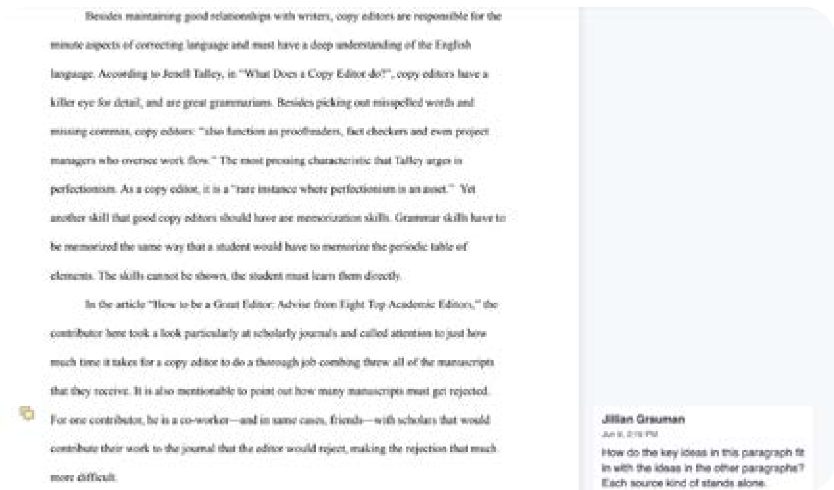


Besides maintaining good relationships with writers, copy editors are responsible for the minute aspects of correcting language and must have a deep understanding of the English language. According to Jenell Talley, in "What Does a Copy Editor do?", copy editors have a killer eye for detail, and are great grammarians. Besides picking out misspelled words and missing commas, copy editors: "also function as proofreaders, fact checkers and even project managers who oversee work flow." The most pressing characteristic that Talley urges is perfectionism. As a copy editor, it is a "rare instance where perfectionism is an asset." Yet another skill that good copy editors should have are memorization skills. Grammar skills have to be memorized the same way that a student would have to memorize the periodic table of elements. The skills cannot be shown, the student must learn them directly.

In the article "How to be a Great Editor: Advise from Eight Top Academic Editors," the contributor here took a look particularly at scholarly journals and called attention to just how much time it takes for a copy editor to do a thorough job combing threw all of the manuscripts that they receive. It is also mentionable to point out how many manuscripts must get rejected. For one contributor, he is a co-worker—and in same cases, friends—with scholars that would

Figure 9. Screen capture showing revisions Lauren made to her paper, indicated by underlined text. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

This was a big improvement, but I did notice some of that original choppiness still hanging on in the final version, which I commented on below.



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Jillian Grauman

How do the key ideas in this paragraph fit in with the ideas in the other paragraphs? Each source kind of stands alone.

Figure 10. Screen capture of Lauren's final draft with a comment from the instructor in the right-hand margin. Image captured by Jillian Grauman.

Similar to Nicole, Lauren's revisions also show positive change. She identified an issue in her own writing, an issue that her reviewer agreed with, and she made good revisions. While she could still do more to connect her ideas together, the final version showed improvement.

Conclusion

While using feedback on your writing may seem like a pretty straightforward task, it's actually hard to do well. It's common to see writing skills as an inherent character trait rather than a skill to develop with time and practice, to have trouble deciphering your feedback, and to be unsure about what to do with your feedback. However, you can get a lot out of your feedback, whether that feedback comes from your instructor, a peer, a tutor, or someone else, with the following steps:

1. setting your own goals
2. reviewing the feedback
3. acknowledging emotional responses
4. developing follow-up questions
5. acting on your goals

Taking these steps will help you to reflect more and improve on your work as a writer. Working with feedback doesn't have to be an exercise in disappointment or confusion—instead it can be the most helpful and effective tool you have for developing as a writer.

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Teacher Resources for What's That Supposed to Mean? Using Feedback on Your Writing

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This essay can frame your class conversation around revision practices, peer review, and teacher feedback. I recommend reading this essay early in a composition class, ideally before the first peer review and before students receive substantive teacher feedback. Familiarizing students with strategies on how to use their feedback before they receive any will help prepare them for taking their feedback seriously and using it to improve as writers. This essay would also work well at the beginning of a unit or major assignment with a heavy revision component.

Many of the discussion questions offered below would work well either before or after reading the essay. You may want to ask students to consider their current feedback practices before reading the essay so they can more effectively compare strategies and reflect on how the strategies would work for them.

If you have students read this essay before receiving any feedback, I recommend doing Activity 1 on the day you discuss the essay. Once students receive feedback (either from peers or you), I recommend doing Activity 2 or 3 to help students better incorporate the strategies into their own writing practices. If you have students read this essay after receiving feedback, I recommend doing either Activity 2 or 3 on the day you discuss the essay.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe you have a fixed or growth mindset about your writing abilities? Why or why not? What could help you grow as a writer?

2. What sorts of emotions do you experience or have you experienced while receiving feedback from others on your writing? How does that impact your revision process?

3. What do you typically do when you receive feedback on your writing from a teacher? From a peer? From a writing center tutor?

4. What do you think you should do with your feedback? Is that different from what you typically do?

5. In a perfect world, what would your writing feedback help you do?

Activity Ideas

Activity 1: Have students look at feedback they received on a piece of their writing from a previous class or writing situation. For students who can find an example, have them consider what they did with this feedback. What more could they have done—or what else could they have done with it? For students who can't find an example, have them consider why they can't find this kind of material. Why don't we tend to hold on to the feedback we receive on our writing?

Activity 2: Have students locate and review recent feedback you have provided them on their writing. Ask students to:

- Identify which comment they found most useful and why
- Identify which comment they found least useful and why
- Identify which comment they found most confusing

Activity 3: Ask students to follow the recommended steps in this chapter for using feedback after a peer review or receiving feedback from the instructor and write about or discuss that experience in class. Students would discuss/write about:

- Goals they had for the feedback
- Emotional responses to the feedback
- Follow-up questions
- Actions they took with the feedback
- Similarities and differences between this process and their previous strategies for using feedback

10 Writing toward Racial Literacy

Mara Lee Grayson

Overview

Curricula that engage students in reading and writing about race and racism are increasingly common in composition classrooms, but writing about race, even when guided by an instructor well-versed in critical race theory and critical pedagogy, isn't easy.* Racial literacy requires that students develop a discursive toolbox with which to examine and respond to the functions of race and racism in society and in their daily lives. This chapter explores why reading, writing, and talking about race and racism matter in first year composition courses, previews some successes and struggles students may face, and offers strategies students can use to work through rhetorical and affective challenges of writing about race and racism. These strategies will help students critically examine and engage with the academic and social worlds they inhabit, communicate productively about often-sensitive subjects, and use their writing to challenge racism and other forms of marginalization and oppression.

At a dinner party a couple of years ago, I was seated across from a married couple I hadn't met before. We started talking about our jobs. The woman was a doctor; the man was a high school teacher. I said I was a professor and that I was working on my second book about education. This piqued their interest. What was the book about? they asked.

"My work focuses on racism in education. I'm writing about how most teaching practices perpetuate racism and White supremacy and how we challenge racism in the classroom."

"Interesting," said the woman. The man nodded his head and asked how I knew the hostess. We didn't talk much after that.

This happens to me a lot, actually, and I'm not the only one who has had this experience. Education professor Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz also writes about someone she met who did everything possible to avoid talking about race: "Each time I tried to center race in our conversation, she would smile and politely change the subject" (385).

Talking about race often makes people uncomfortable, and people who are uncomfortable talking about race generally avoid it, especially cross-racially. Talking about race, however, can actually help people develop *racial literacy*, a set of skills, behaviors, and literacy practices with which to "examine the effects of race and institutionalized systems on their experiences and representation" (Sealey-Ruiz 386).

At this point, you might be wondering what this has to do with you and your writing. Well, you're probably reading this because your teacher assigned it as part of a writing class you're taking, which means that, at some point in your writing class, you're probably going to be writing about race and racism. Like talking about race, writing about race, even when guided by an experienced instructor, isn't easy. Writing about race requires a toolbox full of *cognitive* (mental), *discursive* (communicative), and *affective* (emotional) capacities. I'll share some of those with you in this chapter.

Let's tackle a more general question first, one that might already be on your mind: What's race got to do with writing anyway? It's a great question, and the answer is: a lot.

What Do Race and Racism Have to Do with My Writing Class?

Ideally, the "knowledge, skills, and techniques" you develop in writing classes "are able to transfer to other contexts—disciplinary, civic, personal, and professional" (Driscoll 2). You might interpret this to mean that, as teachers of writing, we want you to be confident writing in your major classes and in your future career. But it's more than that. We don't just want you to read and write academic texts; we want you to read, interpret, and respond to the world around you.

We are surrounded by language and text, but we can't take everything we read at face value. Whether we are students or teachers, we need to read *into* and *through* texts to distinguish valid information from propaganda and misinformation. Language is a strategic medium; it is used rhetorically to elicit particular reactions from real audiences.

Race and racism function rhetorically too. Race is a *social construct*, meaning it is not a biological reality but instead something people created in order to categorize people and determine a system for distributing resources in society. Racism, however, is real – and has substantial, long-lasting impacts on everything in our society, from material resources like housing, health care, employment, and education to our daily interactions with other people, our sense of self, and even our writing and language practices.

There's a longstanding myth that literacy, the abilities to read and write, will open doors in society. It very well might. After all, your literacy practices have contributed to you being here, reading this essay. But that myth is only partly true. A lot of what happens in a racist society has less to do with how you write or communicate than with the body you occupy.

In school, from an early age, one learns a society's history, its values, and the so-called "appropriate" ways to speak, write, and act in its institutions. Think back to your experiences writing in school settings: Were you ever told that your writing was too "informal" or that some of the words you used were "inappropriate" for academic writing? Some teachers, perhaps unintentionally, may have tried to convince you that, to write well, you've got to use a "standard English." If you identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color, you might have been told that "standard English" was key to success.

It might surprise you to learn that, from a linguistic perspective, there is no such thing as "standard English"! That's because all languages are constantly evolving. As writing studies scholar Laura Greenfield explains, what we refer to as standard is "really nothing more than whatever is *not* designated as nonstandard" (46). So, when someone tells you to use "standard English," what they're really telling you is to stop using *your own* English.

Whether or not your teachers realized this, this practice is racist and rooted in White supremacy, the deeply ingrained belief that White people, ideas, and ways of being are superior to all others, a belief that is woven into the fabric of our society. In a White supremacist society, Whiteness becomes a sort of default or a universal standard from which everything and everyone else deviates. For example, maybe you've noticed that some major pharmacies and beauty supply stores have a "Black Haircare" section. This implies that the rest of the products in the store *aren't* for Black hair. Very often, race is only identified when the person or group being referred to isn't White. Whiteness goes unnamed, and White people are afforded privileges like access to resources (from easy-to-find haircare products to employment opportunities), feeling represented (such as by seeing

White faces on television), and the freedom from having to worry about experiencing racism on a daily basis the way Black, Indigenous, and People of Color do.

Racism is the combination of race-based prejudice and power. Civil rights scholar Lani Guinier explains that, to understand how racism functions, we have to acknowledge its "psychological, interpersonal, and structural dimensions" (115). Racism affects us individually and psychologically, such as when we racially label ourselves or are labeled by others or when we internalize stereotypical messages we receive from people around us or in the media. Racism also impacts our interactions with others. You might talk differently or about different topics with a friend of your racial group and a friend from a different racial group. Finally, racism is structural, meaning it works through laws, policies, and official systems and institutions (including schools) within a society.

To recognize and talk back to racist injustice, we need to "make legible racism's ever-shifting yet ever-present structure" (Guinier 100). In other words, we have to be able to read the language and texts of race and racism, even as they change. This requires we develop critical reading and writing skills.

Strategies for Reading, Writing, and Talking about Race

When you practice racial literacy in a writing class, you can expect to do some of the following:

- examine the effects of race and racism on your lived experiences,
- explore your identities as a writer and as a racialized person,
- consider how your approaches to reading and interpreting published texts is situated in your experiences,
- counter-narrate stereotypical and negative representations of communities of color,
- read critically and metacognitively, and
- develop rhetorical awareness and flexibility that will help you in future writing classes and outside of school.

I won't tell you that these are easy tasks. Your professor, however, will guide you through these practices and make sure that you are engaging productively but not unsafely. In the next few pages, I'll share with you some strategies for talking, writing, and reading about race, based upon

my research and my own experiences. These strategies can increase your understanding of race and racism and build the reading, writing, and rhetorical knowledge you'll be expected to learn in your writing class.

Practice Critical Self-Reflection

When I teach a racial literacy-focused writing class, I tell my students a little about myself and what I call my "racial literacy journey"—how I learned about racism. Your teacher may do this too. It might seem strange at first, especially if you're not used to learning a lot about your teachers. You might wonder why your teacher is talking so much about themselves when you're supposed to be talking about writing and racism. When I share this information, I'm trying to do two things: I'm trying to show my students how my perspectives are situated in my experiences in the world, and I'm trying to model the kind of critical self-reflection my students will be asked to do in my class.

I'll do a little bit of that now so you understand what I mean: I'm White, a woman, and ethnically Jewish. I grew up surrounded by people who looked like me and people who didn't, including in my family. We talked about race and racism a lot at home, but, in other spaces, I was discouraged from talking about race. I also saw that my Black and Brown friends were treated differently from me in school: I was kind of a "troublemaker" as a kid and I had a tendency to talk back to my teachers, but I never got in real trouble. The one time I had to report for in-house suspension, I realized that all the other students there were Black, even though half the kids in my middle school were White. I learned later that this is common; Black students are suspended three times as often as White students, even for the same offenses (Skiba).

Throughout my life, I've been called cruel words based upon my ethnicity. I've watched politicians and celebrities make anti-Semitic remarks on television and not be called out for them. I've seen Jewish people in books, movies, and television shows be caricatured and stereotyped.

At the same time, I benefit from White privilege and therefore have never experienced the racism that my friends who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color experience. This means that, experientially, there are limits to my knowledge of race and racism. I will never know what it feels like to not be White, and I always have to check my *whitely* tendencies: the ways I think, speak, and see the world based upon my White privilege. All of this matters in my understanding of race and racism. My experiences, combined with the relative ease and access I have due to my skin color, have helped me understand how White privilege works and

why it's so important to talk back to the stereotypical representations that prevail in the media.

You might be wondering what this means for you and the work you'll do in your writing class. Well, reflecting upon your personal experiences and identities can help you better understand your *positionality*, the way you are situated in relation to particular subjects as a result of your race, gender, socioeconomic class, sexuality, religion, and other identities. As adult educator Jack Mezirow explains, "the justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends upon the context—biographical, historical, cultural—in which they are embedded" (3). Your positionality impacts how you see the world, how you are seen by others, and how you interpret texts and information. This is especially important in our understanding of racism because what one person sees or hears as racism, based upon past experience and prior knowledge, another person might see as benign and inoffensive. There are limits to your understanding, and reflecting critically upon your own positionality can help you recognize those limits.

When you practice critical self-reflection, you do more than identify your assumptions and beliefs—you also question those assumptions and beliefs, where they come from, and how they impact the ways you see the world and the choices you make in your lives. As a result, learning about positionality can also help you better understand your peers and their perspectives and, as a result, communicate more productively with people whose perspectives and experiences differ from your own.

To reflect upon your positionality, you might be asked to write a racial autobiography, a personal narrative in which you consider how you learned about race, racism, and your own racial identities. You might be asked questions like:

- When did you first learn about race?
- Was race talked about in your home when you were growing up?
- Outside your home, were you surrounded by "people who looked like you, spoke your language, or shared similar customs" (Grayson 86)?
- Have you ever been discriminated against because of your race or ethnicity?
- Have you ever discriminated against someone else because of their race or ethnicity?

These are just examples. Your teacher may create other questions to help you think about your experiences and identities. Critical self-reflection

about race requires that you consider how your positionality has impacted your understandings of race and racism, so you may be asked to analyze, rather than just report upon, these experiences. You might be asked why these experiences are significant to you, if your view of these experiences has changed over time, how you think your experiences connect to your racial or ethnic identities, or how you imagine your experiences differ from the experiences of others.

Here's an excerpt from a racial autobiography written by one of my students, Veronique, a Black woman who was raised in a predominantly White suburb in the United States. (All students' names are pseudonyms.) Here, Veronique is writing about a neighborhood nearby where most of the residents were Black:

> It always seemed darker in that neighborhood. I grew up associating the neighborhood's young black men wearing baggy pants and chains with drugs, vandalism, and danger. Whenever they came near, I would walk faster; my heartbeat would rise or I would take a sudden turn. It never occurred to me the similarity in skin tone… I was blind to the racial stereotypical assumptions I was falling into. But I fell right in step with my white neighborhood.

In this excerpt, Veronique practices critical self-reflection by recognizing and considering how she had internalized the racist stereotypes about Black people she had heard in her White neighborhood. She also acknowledges the ways that she saw herself as separate from other Black people, perpetuating a discourse of *exceptionalism* in which some Black people are positioned as different from—and better than—other Black people. By now recognizing her own assumptions, Veronique was able to see how they had come about and how they impacted her view of race and racism.

Critical self-reflection is part of *transformative learning*, the process of transforming "taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets)" into more inclusive, flexible, and reflective ways of knowing that enable you to continue to grow as a learner (Mezirow 7-8).

Read Critically

When you read about race, you'll likely encounter a lot of different types of texts, some of which are multimodal, meaning they aren't only linguistic but instead incorporate visual, digital, or aural modes in addition to words and print. Depending upon what your teacher assigns, you might work with scholarly essays, newspaper articles, stories, movies, advertisements,

song lyrics, or social media posts. You might also practice reading real world situations that you witness or experience in your own life as texts.

In writing classes, we read texts rhetorically and critically, thinking about what they *do* as well as what they say. As you practice racial literacy in your writing class, you'll be asked to pay attention to how meaning is constructed and how texts represent, reinforce, or resist racist belief systems. Because racism is often subtle rather than overt and is embedded in language practices, learning to "decode race and racialism" (Twine 92) when you interact with texts can help you more easily recognize racism and discrimination in real-life situations.

When you read texts critically, you'll start to notice how texts perpetuate stereotypes about people of minoritized racial groups. One of my students told me that, even though "the racial literacy tools she learned allowed her to better understand how she had internalized discrimination" as a biracial woman, she now had trouble watching television "'without seeing how many Black men are portrayed as criminals'" (Grayson 68).

Sometimes these stereotypes and misrepresentations are less apparent. You may recognize them, however, through careful attention to language. When you hear a word like "thug," for example, who is it used to describe? Who do you picture when you read the word "terrorist"? You might associate these words with specific racial, ethnic, or religious groups because of how those words are often used.

You might notice these patterns in visual texts, too. One of my students, Tyrone, noticed that, while the major news networks shared a social media photo of a Black teenager who was murdered, they shared a very different picture of a White criminal. He wrote about this in his final essay for our class:

> We see a pattern in the images the media uses to represent white people. They usually use school photos or formal family photos. When people see formal pictures of the suspect or victim dressed nicely or smiling they associate them with being good… The media represented a convicted rapist in a respectable manner while they represented a slain young man in a disrespectful manner. Again, the differences in the individuals were skin color.

When you encounter stereotypes or misrepresentations of a minoritized group with which you identify, you can use your writing to *counter-narrate* those inaccurate representations. When we write counter-narratives, we tell our stories in ways that contradict the stereotypes we encounter in the media and in popular and political discourse. Counter-narrative is a

significant part of practicing racial literacy for those who identify as members of marginalized racial groups.

Another student, Jaleesa, counter-narrated the portrayal of Muslim people as violent by explaining that people of Muslim descent are actually frequent victims of hate crimes. In addition to offering statistics, Jaleesa discussed her own experiences and the experiences of people she knows personally. After sharing that the mosque she attended had received violent threats, she wrote:

> Many of my friends have chosen to conceal their faith by removing certain religious garb or use a different name to publicly pass as a non-Muslim. I personally do not wear the hijab, so that makes me less likely to be a target in comparison to my fellow Muslims, but I truly worry for individuals who are more visibly adherent to the religion.

Your teacher may invite you to write a counter-narrative to dispel inaccurate and biased representations in media and other texts and to remind you that, when you write, you contribute your voice and your perspective to an academic conversation. Your contributions matter in the classroom.

Explore the Social and Cultural Elements of Writing

The more attention you pay to textual representation and racialized language, the more you'll understand the significance of the words and phrases you use in your own writing, why you might choose certain words over others, and how those words impact your readers. You'll also learn to think about the ways in which your own approaches to writing are situated in social and cultural contexts and how, when you write for an audience, you have to consider real readers who bring their own positionalities and expectations to texts.

"All cultures have *rhetorical expectations*" that influence how members of that culture receive a text (St. Amant 149). These expectations relate to the kinds of information included, the genre of the text, and the conventions of that genre, the typical patterns of organization, style, and language choices. For example, have you ever been told that the thesis statement of your essay should be right at the end of your introduction? It's not true, but it's probably something you've heard in writing classes at least once or twice. Why do you think that is?

In short, it's cultural. Western cultures like the United States place a lot of emphasis on individualism and self-expression and tend to value di-

rectness in written communication. A speaker or writer generally presents an idea and then explains the argument. The emphasis in writing in these cultures is on the individual perspective or argument, which is why that argument tends to appear early in the essay. (In other cultures, writers might be expected to build up to an argument or provide more description before stating their own ideas.)

As writers, we have to think about the effect our choices have on our audience. Generally speaking, when we write in a way that doesn't fit our audience's expectations, our work might be "dismissed as non-credible" (St. Amant 152).

But, like comments about "standard English," that dismissal is part of how racism functions covertly, under the radar, as a part of the normalized practices and assumptions about language and text. If you notice, in the previous paragraph I talked about culture as though it's singular when society is actually racially and ethnically diverse. Still, you've probably learned to write in a way that reflects White Western norms and perspectives. These so-called rules have been passed down through systems and people, like schooling and teachers, for so long that we might think they're the only way to write.

Learning how racism is already embedded within our reading and writing practices can help you more critically consider the choices you make as a writer, which, in turn, can help you better communicate with people in other contexts. When you practice writing for real audiences who bring different rhetorical expectations to the text, you might consider how different audiences might respond to your ideas and the words you use. This can help you think about how to adapt your writing to different contexts, like another class you're taking or an application for a job you're interested in. It can also help you understand where your readers are coming from and better communicate with audiences whose experiences or perspectives differ from your own. (I don't think I'll ever forget the student who told me that the most important thing she learned in my writing class was how to disagree with her girlfriend without getting into an argument!)

There are other benefits to thinking about writing this way as well. How much more comfortable might you feel in a classroom if you could use the variation of English you're most familiar with? Or if you could *code-mesh* by combining the language(s) you use at home with the English you hear in school? How much easier might it be to express yourself in writing if you didn't have to worry that someone would unfairly judge your language?

Sit with Productive Discomfort

I'll warn you now: Chances are that, at some point, you'll experience discomfort when you read and write about race. You might be uncomfortable writing about yourself. You may not be comfortable sharing personal stories or experiences. A comment made by one of your classmates or something you read in a course text might make you uncomfortable. You might be uncomfortable just thinking about it now.

Discomfort is a strange thing in education: a little discomfort can be productive and lead to transformative learning, but a lot can prevent that same transformation. If you've ever had a panic attack or if you struggle with anxiety, you probably know what I mean. It's hard to think clearly when your body is overwhelmed with emotion or your mind feels like it's spinning.

Many of us have been taught that race is an uncomfortable, even dangerous, topic. So, if you're uncomfortable, consider why: were you told as a child not to talk about race outside of the house or with people who don't look like you? Does thinking about racism make you feel guilty or defensive, like you're being accused of something? Have you thought about your own race at length before? Critically writing about race and racism takes work and practice. If you're concerned that you'll say or write the wrong thing and accidentally offend someone, that's actually a great opportunity to pay attention to your language choice and to critically examine your ideas.

Other experiences of discomfort are less productive. One of my students, for example, was worried about writing the racial autobiography because he didn't want "'to turn this into a list of traumas'" (Grayson 88). I worked with him to modify the assignment so that he wouldn't have to rehash painful personal experiences of racism. You should never be forced to share something you don't want to, especially personal experiences that come with painful or even traumatic memories and feelings. Maybe you're uncomfortable because someone else in the class has said or written something offensive. As a teacher, I hope this won't happen and I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the semester establishing shared guidelines for discussions with my students. Still, it does happen on occasion. Just as I do, your teacher will likely have procedures in place for reporting negative situations that arise.

Reflecting upon your feelings is an important part of critical self-reflection. We tend to think of feelings as separate from learning, but that's actually not true at all. Emotion and reason are deeply connected. Two important emotive capacities of racial literacy include the abilities to tolerate

frustration and to empathize with others; expanding these capacities can benefit you as a writer and student. Ideally, throughout college, you'll learn new things and be exposed to new perspectives; some will change your way of seeing the world and some won't. Increasing your abilities to empathize and tolerate frustration can prepare you to engage with new concepts and viewpoints, even those that initially turn you off or confuse you.

As you practice racial literacy, frustration may arise in a few different ways: If you have experienced racism firsthand or if you've spent a lot of time thinking about racism, you might be frustrated that you have to talk about this again. You might get frustrated trying to explain yourself to your classmates, especially if some of them don't have the same experiential knowledge of racism that you do. Even if you have experienced racism personally, learning more about how racism works on a structural level may be frustrating, upsetting, and even infuriating.

If you've not really considered before how race and racism impact your life or society more broadly, you might be frustrated to learn that society isn't as fair or as just as you thought it was. You might question what your parents told you or what you learned in school. You might even question your own successes. If you're the kind of person who likes to solve problems and find answers to questions, you'll probably be frustrated because racism is a big problem that can't be solved with easy answers.

The United States and other Western societies have what linguist Deborah Tannen calls an "argument culture" that frames discussion as a fight between opposing sides. We tend to see ideas through a binary: right or wrong, yes or no, good or bad, win or lose. This prevents "collaborative thinking and the development of social competence by conditioning us to think adversarially in terms of winning or losing, of proving ourselves smart, worthy, or wise" (Mezirow 11). Instead of working together to make meaning, we often battle one another to win a debate.

Writers write to communicate and to participate in ongoing conversations. When you read and write about race, you're likely to encounter ideas and experiences that differ from your own. In such situations, drawing upon your capacity for empathy can lead to more productive interactions with other people. If you identify and acknowledge your own frames of knowing (how you see things and why), you can consider where others are coming from and what they're experiencing. You can't really know what it feels like to walk in another person's shoes, but by listening to your classmates, reading critically, and using your imagination, you can practice "'trying on' another's point of view" (Mezirow 20).

These practices can help you become more mindful, examine the limitations of your positionality, and expand your understanding of others and their perspectives. Empathizing with other people—even if you don't agree with them—can help you navigate disagreements that arise in class, at work, or at home, and growing your capacity to manage frustration increases the likelihood that you'll be able to argue your perspectives productively. Tolerating frustration and being more mindful in stressful situations can even help you take exams or complete other high-stakes assignments!

What Comes Next?

According to sociologist France Winddance Twine, people who practice racial literacy do the following:

1. recognize racism as a contemporary rather than historical problem,
2. consider the ways in which race and racism are influenced by other factors such as class, gender, and sexuality,
3. understand the cultural value of Whiteness,
4. understand the constructedness and socialization of racial identity,
5. are able to decode racialism in seemingly mundane situations, and
6. develop language practices through which to discuss race, racism, and antiracism.

The truth is that you may not get all of those in one semester. That's okay. Think of it this way: For how long have you believed that White supremacy was limited to violent hate groups and not embedded in society's institutional structures and belief systems? How many people have told you that you shouldn't talk about race, or that you're being too sensitive when you do?

My point is, when we practice racial literacy, we're often learning to think about things differently, which takes a lot of unlearning, reorienting, and, simply, practice. It can help to think of racial literacy as a journey instead of a destination: "it is about learning rather than knowing" (Guinier 115). I encourage you to continue practicing these strategies after the semester ends. Ideally, you'll find some classmates or friends with whom you can have productive conversations about race, identity, and racism. As you read and write about race and racism, you'll increase your understanding of how writing functions in the context of a racialized society. When you

share experiences, critically read and respond to texts, and exchange ideas, you become better prepared to communicate across cultures, form communities, and recognize and challenge racist rhetoric you experience or witness in your life. Ultimately, practicing racial literacy helps us work toward antiracism, the active challenging of the systems and structures that maintain racism and White supremacy.

The truth is that literacy may open some doors, but it won't open all of them. Practicing racial literacy in first year composition can help you become more critical about what those doors are made of, why and to whom they're closed, and what it might take to open them.

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Teacher Resources for Writing toward Racial Literacy

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This essay offers an overview of why students may be encouraged to read and write about race and racism in the writing classroom as well as strategies for engaging critically and productively with such activities and assignments. This essay would be a good text to share with students early in the semester to provide some framing and help students to prepare themselves for the work to come.

In this chapter, I suggest approaches to critical self-reflection around identity and positionality and offer suggestions to help students through the affective challenges of reading and writing about racism. I cover possible assignments such as the racial autobiography and the counter-narrative, though I do so broadly to ensure the assignments be adapted to fit the course, curriculum, and institutional context. I also address some of the ways that race and racism are already embedded in literacy practices. It is important to note, however, that I do not offer a comprehensive explanation of the history, societal functions or structures of contemporary racism and White supremacy, nor do I provide extensive unpacking of the racial literacy framework. As such, I suggest that teachers use this essay to supplement other texts (linguistic, visual, and multimodal) that offer such information.

Most importantly, I advise that any teacher considering sharing materials about racism in the classroom first work to develop their own racial literacy in order to guide students through the processes of critically reading and writing about race in productive, equitable ways. This process takes time for teachers, just as it does for students, so it might be a good idea for teachers to practice the assignments and activities alongside students.

I include below a series of questions that invite students to reflect upon their socially and culturally situated experiences and attitudes toward race and racism and to self-direct their racial literacy learning in and beyond the classroom. I also include a sample assignment for the racial literacy autobiography.

Discussion Questions

1. This essay opens with a story about a conversation that stalled when the writer tried to talk about race. Have you experienced a situation like this? What happened? How would you approach a similar situation if it happened today?

2. In the section on critical self-reflection, the writer talks briefly about their personal experiences with both discrimination and White privilege. Did this story impact your attitude toward the writer or your engagement with the essay? If so, why do you think that happened?

3. The writer explains that "racism is already embedded in our reading and writing practices." How, if at all, do you think this has impacted your experiences writing in academic settings? How do you think this might impact the writing you do in school from now on?

4. In the section on productive discomfort, the writer explains that emotions and learning are closely connected. Based upon your experience, which emotions have helped you as a learner? Which have interfered with your learning? What might "productive discomfort" look like for you?

5. The writer lists six characteristics of racial literacy. How many of these were familiar to you? Which were new? Since racial literacy is an ongoing practice, consider developing a plan for continuing the practice once you're finished with this class. Make a list of the people you can have these discussions with, the activities you practiced in class that you'd like to continue, and the resources (texts, social media accounts, in-school programs, people) you'll turn to if you need guidance or information.

Activity: The Racial Literacy Autobiography

The racial literacy autobiography is similar to a literacy narrative. Instead of asking students to consider their earliest and most significant memories with reading and writing, this activity invites students to consider how they first learned about race and racism. The assignment is meant to invite critical self-reflection, so, rather than simply report upon their experiences, students should consider the ways in which their identities and social posi-

tionalities have contributed to the ways in which they decode and discuss race and racism. Here are some sample questions for students to consider, some of which are shared in the chapter:

- When did you first come to learn about the concept of race?
- When did you first come to learn about racism? How?
- Was race talked about in your home?
- Did you grow up near people who looked like you, spoke your language, or shared similar customs?
- What does the word "culture" mean to you?
- Have you ever felt out of place because of your race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class (or some part of your "culture," however you define that term)? What happened?
- Have you ever been discriminated against? How so?
- Have you ever discriminated against someone else? How so? Why?

The questions, of course, are highly customizable but should be at least somewhat open-ended to encourage reflection.

This is best used as an informal assignment early in the semester. Depending upon the level of trust built with students, teachers may collect the assignment, or they may use it as an in-class free-write prior to a more critical discussion of positionality. Once students get to know one another, instructors may invite students to share their personal narratives in small groups. If this is the case, however, it is important that students are told beforehand that their peers may be part of the audience to ensure that they include only what they are willing to share. It is imperative that students are not pushed to share personal details pertaining to their identities or traumatic experiences with racism if they are not ready. Teachers can also build upon this assignment by inviting students to revise it at the end of the semester to incorporate some of the theory and critical framing students engage with throughout the semester.

11 Creating, Using and Sharing Information in Research Communities

Cassie Hemstrom and Kathy Anders

Overview

This chapter extends John Swales' theory of discourse communities into the sphere of information literacy, as it is conceptualized in the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.* We propose the concept of research communities, where discourse communities with the common goal of research use, share, and create information in particular ways. After opening with a personal narrative of how one of us found and joined a research community related to podcasting, the chapter identifies and offers examples of the features of research communities. Finally, the chapter concludes by showing how learning to analyze research communities can help students become more effective information users and creators.

Research Communities

If you wanted to start a podcast, but didn't know how, where would you start? Would you listen to every podcast you could find, or focus on podcasts in a specific area? Or maybe talk with people who have made podcasts before? What information would you need, and where would you go to find that information? You'd probably want to know what kinds of equipment you need to record and edit a podcast, and how you post the episodes for other people to hear. And the less tangible things would probably come to mind next, like finding out how people choose a topic or what

the best length for a podcast is. You could probably find the equipment you need pretty easily on Amazon, but where would you go to get advice and insight on everything else?

One of the authors of this chapter, Cassie, is an avid podcast listener, and a few years ago, the inevitable happened—she said to a friend, "We should start a podcast!" She found the information she needed to create her podcast by seeking out what we call a research community. If you find a community of people who are actively engaged in creating and sharing information about a specific topic or field, you can learn about that topic, find mentors, and become a respected contributing part of the community yourself!

And what if you don't want to start a podcast, but want to start a research paper, or a YouTube channel? The same technique applies! You can learn more about how to create any type of text or media, in any genre, by looking for a research community and asking yourself some questions about how that community functions. There are lots of ways to think about how to do research, and chances are you will, at some point in your academic career, hear that you should use peer-reviewed scholarly sources in your academic essays and not random information that you find on the web. However, if you wanted to learn about how to start a podcast, TikTok, or YouTube channel, going to peer-reviewed scholarly sources probably would not be very helpful. YouTubers tend to share information about how to make videos on YouTube itself, and Google shares guidelines and information about starting channels on their webpages.

The reason why you would look for information for a college essay in a different place than information about starting a YouTube channel is that the members of those communities use, share, and create information in different ways. You may have heard the term "Discourse Communities"—these are certain groups of people who compose texts in conversation with each other, with each other. Discourse communities also have particular features, and it may be helpful to think of them as their own information communities.

In this particular chapter we are talking about *research communities*, which might be thought of as a subset of discourse communities, as they are defined by a scholar named John Swales. Discourse communities, according to Swales (24-27), have six key features that we'll summarize as follows:

- they generally agree upon and publicly share a set of goals
- they have methods for communicating with each other

- they use these methods of communication in order to share information and offer commentary with/to each other
- they use at least one particular genre to achieve their shared goals
- they have a specialized vocabulary
- they have experts in the community who can help people new to the community to learn the ropes and gain expertise

Dan Melzer, in his chapter "Understanding Discourse Communities," explains that, for college students, "understanding what a discourse community is and the ways that genres perform social actions in discourse communities can help you better understand where your college teachers are coming from in their writing assignments and also help you understand why there are different writing expectations and genres for different classes in different fields" (110). The same is true for groups that perform research in conversation with each other. Research communities have the same features of discourse communities, but with the common goal of engaging in research, or the purposeful investigation and creation of information. Just as discourse communities help us to be aware of the writing choices made for specific purposes to help writers achieve their goal in particular contexts, understanding research communities help us develop information literacy. Information literacy is "the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning" (*ACRL Framework*). Breaking that definition down, it means that if you have strong information skills you are able to find and use information well. And it goes beyond just finding information—information literacy is also about seeing how what is ethical or not ethical in research might change in different contexts and understanding how information can best be used to achieve your purposes and shared in a way that helps others see its worth and credibility. And finally, information literacy is about actively, ethically contributing your new information in communities of learning.

By bringing together discourse communities and information literacy, we can give an account of what happens when groups of people engage in research. This helps us understand how to participate in researching, using sources, and creating information in ways that are consistent with the rhetorical purposes of a particular discourse community. Looking at the features of research communities will make it easier to analyze them and to join them yourself. If you know how communities use, create, and share research, then you can learn how to be a member of that community yourself.

Features of Research Communities

Research communities create, share, and use information in ways that are particular to that community. A research community will have the following features:

- they create and share information in cycles and specific locations
- they create and share information in a conversational way
- they use particular genres, formats, and media for creating and sharing information
- they use specific terminologies
- they have expertise levels that are particular to their communities and methodologies
- they have ethical norms for the creation and sharing of information[1]

Considering how a research community works in each of these areas will make it easier to see how to join that community. Let us consider each of these features in more detail.

Table 1. Discourse Communities and Research Communities[2]

Research Community Features	
Discourse Communities	Research Communities
Have a generally agreed upon and publicly shared set of goals	Create and share information in cycles and specific locations
Have methods for communicating with each other	Create and share information in conversational ways
Use these methods of communication in order to share information and offer commentary	Use particular genres, formats, and media for creating and sharing information
Use at least one particular genre	Use a specific lexis
Have a specialized vocabulary	Have expertise levels that are particular to their communities and methodologies
Have experts who can help people new to the community learn the ropes and gain expertise	Have ethical norms for the creation and sharing of information

Cycles and Locations

The availability of information on the open web makes it seem like you can find anything online. However, any information you find on the web

has a home location in an information storage system. Online content has to be stored and made accessible from somewhere, and there is a great deal of information that is not available on the web. Information in research communities may be housed in libraries, archives, databases, intranets, or secure servers. Information in research communities is often housed in particular places. For example, a group of researchers working in a lab will house experiment information in files that lab mates might share, but that the outside public won't be able to access. Once they are ready to share the results of the experiment more broadly, they will write a scholarly article that will be published and made available to readers who subscribe to the journal. If you wanted to get access to this article, you would have to go through your academic library to get access to the article, since libraries pay the subscription fees for their users.

Note that in the example above, the information for the narrow and then broader research communities lived in specific places. You would not be able to find lab reports or scholarly journals on Wikipedia, for example. In order to find information for a given research community, you have to go to the specific places and platforms where those communities share their information.

Notice, too, how in the above example the information the research community produced went through a cycle of raw data and then a publication. Information for research communities may move through cycles. Taking up the example of the lab data above, after the article was published, the news might write about the experiment if the results were groundbreaking. Eventually that information might be included in books or reference materials, like encyclopedias. With each part of the cycle, the information will be housed in a new place, so it is helpful to know where a research community shares its information at a given step in the information cycle.

Conversational Information

The ACRL *Framework* considers "scholarship as conversation," and Swales notes that discourse communities have "participatory mechanisms" (26). What this means in practices is that information sharing is one of the primary goals of research communities, and as such it is conversational in nature. Members of research communities communicate with one another. Scholarly research communities have conversations through publications and conference presentations. Research community members in a business may share conversational information through memos, reports, and business presentations. These pieces of information are intended to be read or

experienced by an audience that will respond in some way, such as publishing subsequent articles in response or sending follow-up memos.

These conversations are not limited to a short moment in time. One scientist might write an article that responds to an article written ten years prior. The speed of the response often depends on the nature of the research and the method of communication. But both authors can still be considered to be part of the same research community even though a great deal of time may pass during the conversation.

The conversational nature of information in research communities means that even as a new member joining a community you have a voice to contribute. When you formulate responses to authors in your community, whether by citing them, evaluating them, or directly responding, you are entering the conversation. Researching is an active, not a passive, effort. It may be helpful to you to think of yourself as having a discussion with other people pursuing a similar goal when you create information and texts in a research community.

Genres, Formats, and Media

Research communities use and create information that comes in particular genres. Sometimes we think of genres as works sharing common goals and internal features, like motifs. In artistic literary works, you may associate the term genre with horror, comedy, tragedy, or romance. John Swales defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes…[and] patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience" (58). In her chapter, "Navigating Genres," Kerry Dirk proposes thinking of genres practically as a writer. Dirk says that we can start to figure out how to compose a type of text that is new to us by looking for other examples of the genre—similar types of texts written in response to similar situations (250). That way, we can see what strategies other writers have used to achieve a goal that we share. Genre, in a research community, applies to the type of information the research community members post. For example, in scholarly research communities members might create lab reports, scholarly articles, and conference presentations.

Closely tied to the idea of genre is format, and sometimes the words are used interchangeably. Format refers to the arrangement of the information. For example, a school paper will have a heading, a title, the body of the paper, and a bibliography. An email, on the other hand, has an opening salutation, a body, and a closing salutation. The way the text is arranged in each is a different format. Items within the same genre often contain

similar formats. Members of research communities use common formats in their works.

Finally, information in research communities is shared in a common medium. Medium refers to material of the information. For example, a book can exist in either a digital or a paper medium. A movie can be in a streaming digital file, on a DVD or Blu-Ray disk, or even a VHS tape. Many types of information are now in digital media available online, and so the distinction of medium is less notable than it used to be. Most research communities, even if they produce information in physical media such as paper books or journals, now also produce the same items in a digital medium as well.

Specific Terminologies

Research communities use specific terminologies because groups of people doing research use precise terms to refer to things in ways that other groups of people would find meaningless or for which they would use other terms. For example, in the gaming community people might use the term "spawn" to talk about a character regenerating after it dies. Outside of the gaming community, "spawn" refers to the offspring of amphibians or fish. Likewise, in the medical community doctors, nurses, and researchers use the term "otitis media," where members of the general population would say "middle ear infection." Medical professions use specific words for medical conditions that the general public does not use. Understanding the lexis used research communities is necessary not only for understanding and participating in the community, but for finding information as well. If you went to a library database and searched for just "middle ear infection" and not "otitis media" as well, you would miss finding many scholarly articles, because "otitis media" is a term that medical researchers writing articles use in scholarly journals. Since medical research communities use scientific language in much of their writing, it is necessary to use those terms as well in order to find and use information about those topics.

Expertise

Research communities have experts who lead the community in providing information that is considered reliable by that community. In order to provide this type of mentorship, there need to be a sufficient number of experts to balance less experienced members in the group. What counts as expertise is determined by the members of the research community, and those standards can vary from one group to the next (ACRL *Frame-*

work). For some research communities, lived experiences are necessary for expertise. For other groups, it may be some type of education or training. In yet other groups public successes may be the criteria for expertise. It is the members of the research community that decide what counts. For example, in the case of a YouTube research community, someone who has not created a successful YouTube channel might not be considered an expert, while someone who has a large number of subscribers might be. With doctors, expertise comes through a combination of education (a medical degree, and in some cases a Ph.D.) and hands-on training (a residency).

As you participate in a research community, pay attention to what criteria community members use to evaluate expertise. Determining those factors will help you figure which voices stand out as being reliable sources of information. Figuring out those criteria, when it is having a certain type of training, or using a certain type of research method, or demonstrating previous experience will help you as you develop as a member of that community.

Ethical Norms

Groups of people doing research have ethical codes about how information can be used and shared in that community. For example, in medical research groups patient information must not be publicly released, both by law and by moral code. In the YouTube community, creators are careful to respect intellectual property and copyright laws, so copying someone else's video and uploading it as your own is considered unethical. It is also a copyright violation. In the academic world, plagiarism, or using someone's words or ideas without giving them credit, is a serious offense.

The ethical norms of research communities are influenced by many factors, including laws, professional standards, institutional guidelines, and broad cultural understandings. Additionally local culture and context are equally as important in determining what is considered to be acceptable. Because violating ethical norms can have serious consequences and because they can vary substantially from group to group, it is important to understand what the specific ethical norms and expectations are for any research group in which you wish to participate.

Anyone looking to join a research community can look for the laws, best practices, and guidelines that govern the ethical use of information for that community. For example, at research universities in the United States, research related to human subjects requires review by an Institutional Review Board to ensure that the research is being conducted ethically. Information about what types of research require review is posted online

through university research offices and in conduct handbooks. When joining any research community, it is important to learn about the institutional, professional, and governmental codes of ethics that you need to follow.

How to Analyze and Join a Research Community

Let's play out what these features actually mean, and how you can use your understanding of research communities to find and share knowledge. We'll use an anecdote about joining a new research community from Cassie (one of the co-authors of this chapter) to work through the process of identifying the features of a specific research community.

> Cassie: A couple of years ago, a friend and I wanted to start our own podcast. As we started planning, I realized there is so much more that goes into building a podcast. It involves a lot of research, about both the topics discussed in the podcast itself and the art of creating a successful podcast. Sometimes I start at Wikipedia to get an overview of the topic, then follow the links at the bottom of the page to more stable and reliable sources[3]. But researching a more complex concept is a bit trickier—what I was looking for was not just information, but a community of information.
>
> When beginning a podcast, you need to consider who your audience will be, and where or how they will listen. You need to have a good title and a quick and catchy tagline. You need to decide how long to make your episodes, if you want to have seasons, and so much more. And the research! I wanted to talk about animals, and I knew that I wanted to use reliable information and show that their listeners could trust my cohost and me. But what research sources are appropriate to use in a podcast made for all ages? And how the heck do you cite research in a podcast? You definitely can't use an MLA in-text citation and Works Cited page!
>
> I had educated guesses for a lot of this, but that wasn't going to cut it. I needed to hear from the experts. I needed to find out where podcasters share personal experiences, best practices, and tips and strategies. I needed to see where they communicate with each other. I also needed to learn where they do their research on podcasting—what sources exist and are considered reliable and trustworthy for sharing expert knowledge about how to podcast.
>
> What it came down to was that my cohost and I were going to have to learn how to create media in a genre that was new to us,

> and to do so, we would need to find the communities of knowledge about this genre. So before we even recorded our first episode, I started searching for research communities focused on podcasting. I found several great groups on Facebook and communities on Twitter, and after lurking for a bit to see how people talked to each other and what sorts of information and feedback they shared, I started engaging in two groups: *Underdog Podcasts* and the *Lady Pod Squad*. Both were extremely open to offering kind advice to newbies. The members shared advice, asked questions, linked to interesting resources, and carried on constructive discussions. The posters weren't just trying to promote their own podcasts and get more listeners from the group; they were making connections, building collaborations, and working together so that everyone could create better podcasts.
>
> Participating in these locations of podcast research communities helped me and my cohost take that final leap into recording. Two years later, I am an active member of both of these groups, still learning from the other members, but helping to contribute to that shared goal of creating excellent podcasts. What I found in these groups were communities where people share information and strategies for researching - places that, like the discourse communities, help people to engage in discussing, learning, and building knowledge about a field or a topic.

Thinking about research communities and the features of research communities is useful for when you need to conduct research in a field that is new to you or contribute to the creation and exchange of information in a field in ways you haven't previously. Asking yourself some questions and looking to see where the answers might be found will help you find your footing and feel confident about entering into new research communities. In order to engage in a research community, you can analyze the features of the community as Cassie does in this example, and teach yourself how members of the community create and share information in specific locations, how they use genres, media and formats, who the experts in the community are and how to recognize their credibility, what terminology they use, and what their ethical norms are for creating, sharing and using information

Take a look at this table to see how Cassie can identify and articulate the features of the podcast research community she joined. You can use this same table to analyze your own research community.

Table 2. Completed Research Community Analysis for Podcasting Groups.

Research Community Analysis Table	
Research Community Questions	Podcasting Groups
Does the community create and share information in cycles and specific locations? Where?	Yes, in Facebook groups, Twitter posts, and podcast episodes
Does the community create and share information in a conversational way? How?	Yes, members converse on all the above sites, even across podcast episodes. They also use information that they create and share to revise their podcasting practices.
What particular genres, formats, and media do the community members use?	Podcast episodes, social media posts, show notes, YouTube videos, FB or Instagram live
Does the community use specialized terminology? Like what?	Yes! Some terms are specific to the podcasting community, but others are everyday words or phrases that have specific meanings in the podcasting community, like "guest" and "platform," for example.
Are there experts in researching in the community? What qualifies as expertise?	Yes. Expertise is not defined by monetary success, but by experience and respect within the community and from listeners.
Does the community have ethical norms for the creation and sharing of information? Like what?	Yes— giving credit to other podcasts you listened to for research, not using someone else's media without permission, etc.

Closing Thoughts

Entering a research community is not a fast process. It is one that takes time and participation. Members of research communities range from novice to expert, and people may move in and out of research communities over time. Don't be frustrated if you discover that the information in a research community is not immediately intelligible to you. Understanding the nuances of conversations, genres, and norms requires repeated engagement with information, texts, and platforms. Chances are you are already part of a research community but you may not have thought of your group in that way. You may have started because you had an interest that you wanted to pursue, and that interest developed into research. Research commu-

nities are dynamic, because not only are members taking in information, they are creating, sharing, and responding to it. When you join a research community, you become not only a user of information, but a creator, too. While you may have already done this in your personal life, you will also join a research community in your academic career. Early on, you might be a novice member, but as you progress through your education you will become more of an expert. It is exciting to consider that as you learn, you will also actively contribute to your community.

Notes

1. Research communities are an adaptation of Swales' work about discourse communities (24-27) that is integrated with the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.

2. Discourse community text is adapted from Swales (24-27). Research community text is adapted from the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.

3. Wikipedia can be a good point for beginning research projects, as James Purdy notes in "Wikipedia Is Good for You?!" (209). This is the familiar topic research journey that Randall McClure discussed in "Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills," and it serves many students very well when researching and writing a topic-focused research paper.

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Teacher Resources for Creating, Using and Sharing Information in Research Communities

This essay is intended to help students understand that research is a skill that encompasses practices from both composition and information literacy. Research is often taught as something extra that you do for some papers on top of writing. In many situations, students' in-class experiences with researching is encompassed in a "library day," where a librarian walks students through using the college library website to search databases and locate books. However, that type of learning does not reflect the broad array of information seeking, sharing, and creating practices that accompany the activities of many researchers. In this chapter, we seek to help students see research as an integral and ongoing part of the writing process, and as a social action, in and through which they are engaging with a community of researchers. We want students to understand that the heuristics for research shift depending on the communities with which they are engaging, and we want to equip them with skills for identifying and employing the best information use and practices agreed upon by their communities.

Teaching students about research communities will work best when they already have been introduced to the concept of discourse communities, and this approach can be used in any college level course, with appropriate context and assignments. We recommend that the chapter is taught with *Writing Spaces* chapters including Kerry Dirk's "Navigating Genres," Dan Melzer's "Understanding Discourse Communities," Randall McClure's "Googlepedia: Turning Information Behaviors into Research Skills" and James Purdy's "Wikipedia is Good For You!?"

Discussion Questions

1. The authors begin the chapter with an example of a research community. What is a research community that you participate in? How does it meet the following criteria:
    - Where is information in the community created and shared?
    - What questions and conversations are people in this community sharing?
    - What genres do researchers use when they create information? Are there multiple genres? Multiple formats or media?

- What are the particular terms that this community uses to refer to objects, events, or ideas?
- Who are the experts in the community? Why are they considered experts?
- What are the values and norms about research and information in the community?

2. Discourse Community or Research Community? In a small group, share examples of communities you participate in—one example could be your writing course! Review the criteria for discourse communities and the criteria for research communities in the chapter. Decide as a group which of the examples shared by group members are discourse communities and which are research communities.

3. Explore how a text might demonstrate the characteristics of a research community. With a small group, pick a peer-reviewed journal and skim the archives. What can you learn about the research community who shares, discusses, and responds to the research published in the journal?

4. Consider a profession that you are interested in pursuing. What sorts of research do people who work in this profession need to do on a daily basis? Weekly? Periodically? When do they use information? And where do they find and share information?

Activities

Students can conduct research community analyses on a variety of different scales. For an in-class assignment, ask students to fill out the following analysis table.

Table 3. Research Community Analysis Table

Research Community Analysis Table	
Research Community Questions	
Does the community create and share information in cycles and specific locations? Where?	
Does the community create and share information in a conversational way? How?	

Research Community Analysis Table	
What particular genres, formats, and media do the community members use?	
Does the community use specialized terminology? Like what?	
Are there experts in researching in the community? What qualifies as expertise?	
Does the community have ethical norms for the creation and sharing of information? Like what?	

Students might also have questions about how discourse communities and research communities differ. After asking students to explore the questions above individually or with a small group, pose this as a discussion question. You can open that question up to the class, asking them to use examples from the reading and also from their own experiences in order to see how discourse and research communities intersect and where they diverge.

Students can also explore research communities as a longer stand-alone assignment wherein a final project might be a paper, video, or infographic demonstrating how a particular community meets the criteria for a research community. Alternatively, a research community analysis can be used as process-work for a larger assignment such as a literature review or for a more nuanced take on an annotated bibliography assignment.

12 Public Writing for Social Change

Ashley J. Holmes

Overview

This essay challenges students to use public writing to embrace their role as an "academic citizen" (i.e., someone who takes the writing and research we do in college and puts it to practical and civic use in our communities in the hopes of contributing toward positive social change).* Beginning with invention and how to find an exigent public issue, the chapter moves students through important steps of planning to write for a public rhetorical situation, such as defining and researching a public audience, genre of writing, and context for eventual publication or circulation. The essay provides a brief introduction to public sphere theories to help students move beyond thinking of their audience in public writing as "the general public" and instead embrace a more specific audience within the multiplicity of publics for their writing. With examples from a broad range of genres and styles that fall under the umbrella of public writing, the essay offers support for more traditional public writing assignments (e.g., the op-ed or letter to a representative), as well as digital or multimodal assignments (e.g., blogs, social media campaigns, or digital stories).

Can a tweet—a genre of public writing—cause social change? There's an article I like to teach by Malcom Gladwell that explores this question. In "Small Change: Why the Revolution Won't Be Tweeted," Gladwell recounts the story of four freshmen from North Carolina A&T who sat down at a Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960, sparking a series of sit-ins and protests. Being skeptical of the impact of social media,

Gladwell reminds us that all the events of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s "happened without e-mail, texting, Facebook, or Twitter." On one hand, Gladwell's critiques may be warranted when we think about isolated instances of what some people call "clicktivism" or "slacktivism"—things like clicking a "like" button, changing a profile picture's frame to support a cause, or signing an online petition. On the other hand, Gladwell wrote this article in 2010, and we have since witnessed the power of groups to use social media and online tools to organize broader movements, such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and many others.

While just one tweet or letter to the editor isn't going to lead to sweeping social change by itself, using public writing to respond to the exigences of our current times can help us tap into networks that may advance a cause one step at a time. As Julius Bailey and David Leonard note in their study of the Black Lives Matter movement: "The expressions of black love, the creation of spaces of protest, the demands for justice that follow, *each can gather momentum* and spread to become *large-scale social movements* that can no longer be ignored" (emphasis added, 77). Sometimes public writing can be a small snowflake contributing to the momentum of a growing snowball, but it can just easily melt without having much effect. For writing to have the potential of a public impact beyond our personal thoughts on the page, beyond our peers in the class or the teacher assigning a grade, we have to successfully engage with a public rhetorical situation for our writing, finding ways to connect with the efforts of broader publics and counterpublics.

Writing for a public rhetorical situation means planning ahead by choosing a timely and relevant public issue, as well as anticipating the ways we will publish and circulate our writing to reach the public audiences who can help effect change. In this essay, we will walk through important components of planning, writing, and publishing to consider when composing public writing for social change. A first step in the process, though, is to understand the possibilities and privileges of your role as an academic citizen.

Academic Citizens

Take a minute and brainstorm a quick list of characteristics or words that come to mind when you, separately, think of the word "academic" and the word "citizen."

Table 1: Brainstorming Characteristics of "Academic" and "Citizen"

Academic	Citizen
•	•
•	•

Under your list of characteristics for "academic," perhaps you brainstormed words like "school," "books," "research," or "teachers." You might have listed characteristics like "smart" or "intellectual." You might have approached the list by describing what you envision as *not* academic, by listing things like "not personal" or "not practical," whether you agree with those designations or not. For the column of characteristics and words for "citizen," did you list words like "government," "voting," or "civic duty"? You might have brainstormed your own role as a citizen by thinking about your local "community" or your "country of origin."

Now that our creative juices are flowing, let's put these two words together. In what ways is it possible to bring together what we do as writers and researchers in college with what is expected of us as citizens? For me, being an academic citizen means taking the scholarly work we do in college and putting it to practical and civic use in our communities in the hopes of contributing toward positive social change. All the work you do as a student to research issues and write about them in persuasive ways has the potential to shape the world around you, but only if you circulate your writing to reach public audiences beyond your school.

The concept of an "academic citizen" is not entirely new; many scholars believe in a broad role for education that is tied to democratic ideals, as well as a more public conception of intellectuals. For example, writing in his *Prison Notebooks* in the 1920s and '30s, Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci argued that all people are intellectuals, whether they become an intellectual through advanced schooling, social status, or life experience. Gramsci sees school as central in developing a working-class group of intellectuals—what he calls "organic intellectuals"—that will critically question the traditional structure of how knowledge is produced (Hoare and Smith 131). Building on some of the foundational ideas of Gramsci, Henry A. Giroux has written about the importance of public universities and colleges making a commitment to address society's problems. Similarly, Ellen Cushman argues that "public intellectuals" should use their research "to address social issues" and improve "under-served neighborhoods" (329).

The concept of an organic or public intellectual has a lot in common with what I mean by being an academic citizen.

In the next few pages, I hope to convince you that making a slight shift in how you think about your role in higher education can help you move toward these more public and civic goals and to start a journey toward becoming an academic citizen. Instead of only thinking about yourself as a student doing work for the teacher, begin thinking about the potential for your academic work to contribute toward efforts to address social injustices in your community, state, or country. While one single letter or 280-word tweet is unlikely to cause a sea change, writing that is publicly circulated has the power to tap into broader networks, movements, and efforts that, when combined, can help us move one step closer to social change, even if that step is small. I would like to invite you to think about how some of the academic research and writing you do for school can become something more than just a grade—whether that's through your contributions to your church bulletin, for example, or a letter you send to your state representative.

Finding an Issue: Invention and Exigency

Being an effective public writer starts with having a good issue. When you think of all the many things you *could* write about, what does it mean to have a good issue? And, how can you find one? I recommend you choose an issue that meets the following criteria:

1. public—in other words, it's discussed and debated in the public realm or has implications for public audiences and communities,
2. personally relevant—it should ideally be something that you care about or that interests you, and
3. timely—it's relevant to this specific moment.

Choosing a public issue does not mean you need to ignore personal concerns. In fact, it can present an opportunity to make the personal public by using your interests, experiences, and beliefs to help fuel your public writing and arguments. To aid in your public writing journey, let me tell you about two rhetorical concepts: invention and exigency.

Invention—one of the five rhetorical canons (the others are arrangement, style, memory, and delivery)—is a valuable rhetorical tool; it involves a process of discovery that can help you figure out what to say or write. Invention is meant to be generative. In other words, it's meant to

help you generate lots of ideas that could be useful in your writing and research. Eventually you will need to narrow those ideas down for your argument, selecting and arranging the ones that help you most persuasively make your case. However, during invention, "you are trying to come up with as many ideas as the situation and topic will allow. So turn your judgment down to zero while inventing. Keep an open mind" (Pullman 112).

As you are trying to find a public issue and decide what you will say about it, you might try various invention strategies, like the "Writing on Location" activity explained below, to help you generate more ideas.

An Invention Activity: Writing on Location

Choose a local, public location—an actual, physical spot or site—where you can observe and write for a short amount of time—whether that's with pen and paper or typing on your phone, tablet, or laptop. Consider a spot with some interesting visuals or bustling activity that will prompt you to brainstorm or freewrite ideas related to your assignment. While visiting your location, find a spot to sit, stand, or lie down where you can write for a few minutes. Compose a freewrite or reflection that informally captures whatever comes to your mind while you are actually, physically in the location. What do you see? What do you hear? What is intriguing? What seems surprising? You are encouraged to take pictures and/or videos that will help capture your experiences in this location at this moment and may serve as evidence in digital, multimodal assignments. (When taking pictures or videos in public, you should be particularly respectful of the privacy of people around you and protect their anonymity.)

When I assign students to write on location, they often end up with relevant and timely public issues. There is something about being physically present in a public space that helps writers begin to form a reaction. One of my former students, for example, chose to write on location at a historic cemetery near her apartment. She was distressed to see the many broken and cracked tombstones and dilapidated conditions at the cemetery. This eventually led to her composing a public blog about how local residents could (and should) get involved with the efforts of a cemetery preservation and restoration society. Another student wrote on location at the university's library late in the evening and became frustrated when the library began closing. She used some of the notes from her "Writing on Location" freewrite to help develop a public letter to the library's Dean to extend the library's hours.

Invention activities like writing on location may be especially helpful at the start of your process. However, invention can happen "at any stage

of the writing process" (Trim and Isaac 108). You shouldn't hesitate to go back to the generative, brainstorming work of invention if you become stuck, even if you have already started writing or revising a draft. Writing on location may not work for all of your interests, but give it a try and see if it helps you work to find a public issue for your writing. (For suggestions of other invention activities and practices, read Trim and Isaac's "Reinventing Invention.")

As you are discovering new ideas through invention, I would also like to encourage you to keep in mind possible exigences related to your issue. Doing so will help ensure your issue and public response is timely and relevant for your targeted audience. Rhetorician Lloyd F. Bitzer argued that any rhetorical situation has three constituent parts: an exigence, an audience, and a set of constraints (6). The exigence is the sense of urgency that demands or invites a rhetorical response, whether that's the delivery of a speech, the submission of a college essay, or the painting of a mural on the side of a building, for example. You may see the exigence as the assignment that your teacher has asked you to write; it certainly is urgent that you complete the assignment if you want to succeed in the course. Even though our audience or exigency may get us going with writing, "the force which drives composing is the writer's own set of goals, purposes, or intentions" (Flower and Hayes 69). The exigences for your writing can and often are a combination of personal intentions and school-initiated assignments.

When you write for a public rhetorical situation (even if it is pulling double duty as a class assignment), it is important to establish a public exigence for your issue. Exigences can work in your favor if you can frame your issue and stance in a way that shows the urgency of the matter for your audience. To help situate your issue within an exigence, you might put yourself in the shoes of a skeptical reader and ask: why this issue? And, why now? For example, a student in one of the civic writing courses I taught selected to research and write about a bill that would allow local governments to relocate monuments. He was able to situate that issue and frame it within current events news stories at the time that were related to the removal of confederate monuments; this helped him build urgency and establish timeliness for the issue, even though the bill did not explicitly mention confederate monuments. Establishing an exigence can hook your readers and keep them reading. Speaking of readers, who are your readers? In the next section, we will explore options for engaging a realistic public audience for your writing.

Engaging Realistic Publics: Preliminary Research and Planning

The parts of a rhetorical situation are connected in ways that can make it difficult to make some decisions—like discovering your issue and defining the exigence—without also considering other components—like the audience or genre for your writing. As you narrow your public issue and consider its relevance, you should also begin thinking about who you will write to and in what form. This section provides strategies for how to research possibilities for your public rhetorical situation by understanding which publics you are addressing.

When you think about the audience for a piece of public writing, what first comes to mind? Easy—the general public, right? The general public seems to cover most any audience for writing that is meant for someone other than oneself (like a personal journal) or the teacher (for class assignments). Everything else tends to be lumped in with "the general public"—like the people out there who read newspapers or your Instagram followers. Here's the problem. There's really no such thing as *the general public*. In fact, my quick list of audiences above should already suggest to you that each of those groups has a set of distinct characteristics, even if newspaper readers and your Instagram followers share some things in common. What kinds of evidence they may find convincing or how you might be rhetorically persuasive in your arguments is impacted by your selection of audience. Trying to write to an amorphous, generic mass of people would set you up for challenges. To further demonstrate this point, let me take a quick aside to frame the significance of "publics" and the public sphere.

Researchers who study and write about the public sphere—that space where the so-called general public comes together to discuss, write about, and debate issues that they have in common—help us understand how we can be more effective public writers. For example, Jürgen Habermas conceived of the public sphere as an idealized space accessible to all. Habermas examined how people in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries came together in places like Britain's coffee houses and France's salons to debate civic issues. This marked a shift from the typically personal or private conversations people had in their homes. While Habermas's conception of the public sphere was foundational, his work has been criticized for being overly idealized. If you were not a White male with property, you were not able to participate in civic debates in the public sphere.

Nancy Fraser and others have argued for a more nuanced conception of publics—yes, the "s" on "publics" is important. Fraser studied "coun-

terpublics"; historically, these were public spheres that existed alongside the coffee houses and salons. Counterpublic gatherings and clubs gave opportunities for women, the working class, and others without money or privilege and who were excluded from dominant public spheres to develop "alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser 62). The takeaway here is that to conceive of a singular public sphere—or *the* general public—is inaccurate; there is a "plurality of competing publics" and counterpublics (Fraser 61).

Take a minute and think about the different public and counterpublic spheres in your own life: where do some of your family, friends, or community groups gather? What do you talk about? Are there some topics that are taboo or off-limits? Are there certain styles and ways of speaking that you use with those groups? The answers probably vary depending on which public or counterpublic spheres you are envisioning. Recognizing a multiplicity of publics means acknowledging and valuing the way our differences can challenge us to alter and expand our views of the world.

Defining and Researching Your Public Rhetorical Situation: Considerations of Audience, Purpose, Genre, and Context

I invite you to take a few minutes to brainstorm the parts of your public rhetorical situation. We've already been exploring exigent issues and publics/counterpublics, but now it's time to narrow to a more specific audience, define your purpose, select your public writing genre, and select the context for publication/circulation. Because these parts of your writing are connected, you may find it helpful to complete the following "Planning for Your Public Rhetorical Situation" activity, which asks you a series of questions about each. (Some of these questions have been adapted from Louise Dunlap's "Audience Analysis Grid" (127).)

Activity: Planning for Your Public Rhetorical Situation

As you prepare for a public writing situation, I invite you to use the following prompts to help you explore potential audiences and to analyze the relationships among issue, purpose, audience, genre, and context.

Issue and Purpose: Write a few sentences about how you understand your issue at this point. What do you already know? What do you need to know? What are your goals for public writing? What do you hope to accomplish?

Possible Publics: Make a list of at least 5 possible audiences you *could* address through public writing. Why do they (or should they) care about your issue? Can they effect the kind of change you are asking for?

Narrowed Audience: Circle one audience from your list above that you'd like to explore in more detail. Conduct some preliminary research and begin analyzing this possible audience. What does the audience already know about the issue? How have they been engaged with it (if at all) already? What do you think they need to know? What are their attitudes, beliefs, or values? How might you be able to find common ground with this audience?

Genre: What genre would be most fitting and persuasive for your selected audience? How will the genre impact the way you communicate your message? What are the typical conventions (style, structure, tone, use of visuals, etc.) of the genre?

Context for Publication: How will you "go public" with your writing to reach your intended audience? What publication venues—print or digital, formal or informal—would be appealing to your audience and fit with your message? What genre options are available to you within the possible site of publication? How will you circulate your writing?

As you work through this set of questions, I hope you will begin to narrow and define not only your public issue but also the essential components of your public writing situation.

A common challenge student writers face with public writing is thinking of the public as ambiguous (Weisser). Writing studies researcher Christian Weisser advocates for students to "locate strong publics where their voices can lead to action," so that public writing has a greater chance of leading to "significant, tangible, immediate results" (Weisser 109, 111). To locate strong publics for your writing, you must understand that there is a plurality of publics and then begin to narrow to the specific public or counterpublic communities you will target as your audience. You begin that process by brainstorming very specific kinds of readers who are impacted by or would be interested in your public issue. For example, you could consider demographic groups (e.g., age, gender identity or sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, geographic location, etc.).

As you are thinking of potential public audiences, you could also let the potential place of publication help define your audience. For instance, if your final piece of public writing will be a Facebook post to your account, your audience would be defined by your Facebook friends (in which case

you might begin brainstorming the mix of publics and counterpublics that exist within your own set of friends). Or, if you want to try to publish your writing as an op-ed in your school's newspaper, you would want to define your audience through the students at your school and the diverse sets of peer groups they represent; perhaps you want to tailor that audience to be even more specific, so you are speaking directly to LGBTQ+ students at your school. As you make progress on selecting your issue or audience, consider how other components like your genre or place of publication may afford new opportunities or present new constraints in how you compose your public writing.

One of my preferred ways to define a public audience is by selecting an actual person or organization with a name and actual address (whether a physical address or email address). Writing to a specific person takes some of the guessing game out of trying to understand a large and complex group of people. You can and should "analyze your audience to learn where their views differ from yours" contends Louise Dunlap in her book *Undoing the Silence: Six Tools for Social Change Writing*; then turn that audience analysis into a "communication strategy" (120). This becomes a bit easier when your audience is a specific, actual person. Students in my classes have researched, written, and mailed letters to the university president, state and national representatives, directors of non-profit organizations, celebrities, athletes, and CEOs of businesses—just to name a few single-person audiences.

Keep in mind that successfully meeting the needs of your audience may result in changes to the style, structure, and tone of your writing compared to the kind of writing you typically submit for your college classes. Compared to lengthy research essays, most public writing genres should be concise, clear, and direct—free of jargon that would be unfamiliar to the audience. It would also be inappropriate to include parenthetical MLA citations or a Works Cited list for most public genres. To let your audiences know where you found your information, shift to using attributive tags—identify sources by title, author, year of publication, and/or place of publication within your writing. Finally, while the kind of peer-reviewed sources you typically use in college can provide good evidence in public writing, a compelling personal story may be more effective and convincing to some public audiences—a combination of personal evidence with research-based evidence can be ideal.

I often encourage students to create lists of public genres just to get an expansive set of ideas for the range of options they have; here are a few public writing genres that have been popular with students over the

years—many of which were combined as a series of posts or as a digital, multimodal project.

- meme
- infographic
- podcast
- editorial
- digital story
- newsletter
- map
- email
- photo essay
- blog
- website
- social media post
- business letter
- flyer/poster

This list is certainly not exhaustive. What other examples of public writing genres can you think of?

Considering Digital Publics

Today, we encounter much of the public writing we read in digital public spheres. Digital writing offers writers a unique set of affordances and challenges when communicating your message. You have the opportunity to compose in multiple modes, incorporating visuals or audio with your writing. Many multimodal texts allow for experimentation, creativity, and even disruption of the status quo in ways that may be compelling for your argument. In my classes, students have created Google Maps, posted to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, composed blogs, and circulated online petitions. For example, in a Digital Writing and Publishing course I teach, one student paired a Google Map of the best skateboarding locations around town with a blog that made a public argument for transforming vacant parking lots into legal skating locations. Digital public writing can present new opportunities to communicate our messages in ways that challenge traditional styles of knowledge production and textual circulation.

With these new opportunities, though, comes a set of expectations for being intentional with issues of visual design and layout. Alex Reid notes in "Why Blog? Searching for Writing on the Web" that we should con-

sider issues of "design and layout" as interrelated to "questions of content" when composing a blog post (315). Effective digital design often means embedding media and/or incorporating hyperlinks to external sites (Carroll). Savvy online readers expect well-designed, interactive online content.

One of the benefits of situating your writing in digital online publics is the opportunity you have to reach a broad and diverse set of online readers and to connect with broader social movements. In her research about a digital campaign to stop violence against women, Jennifer Nish concluded that digital publishing increases the reach of activism, making the spread of material "more visible than some print-based forms of activist communication" (240). Similarly, you can increase your reach on social media platforms through the use of hashtags to more effectively reach a specific audience. When used effectively, the hashtag itself carries rhetorical weight and can help communicate a host of positions within just a word or phrase (Langford and Speight).

Digital publishing often allows for a multimodal mix of genres to help you communicate your public message effectively. In one of the Civic Writing classes I taught, a student researched a series of state-level education bills. For her final public project, she created infographics that helped break the education bills in layman's terms, explaining how they would impact the state if passed. To follow through with circulating her message, this student posted a series of tweets with links to her online infographics. Here's one example tweet: "For anyone interested in #EducationPolicy, here are 5 bills that are currently sitting on @GovernorDeal's desk waiting to be signed into law. #GaEdYouthCmte #GaHigherEdCmte." Here you can see how the student used a mix of hashtags to connect with public audiences who may be interested in her issue and @-ing the Governor who ultimately would make the decision of whether to sign them into law. She also effectively uses exigence by noting that the bills were sitting on the Governor's desk waiting to be signed.

While this section has only scratched the surface of digital public writing, I hope it gives you a preview of some of the opportunities and additional expectations that arise when you situate your writing online.

Going Public with Writing: Publication and Circulation

You may be wondering about the most important part of public writing—the act of going public through publication and/or circulation of your writing. Some students who are assigned public writing for a class go through

the motions but then ultimately submit their writing only to the teacher for a grade. I would like to challenge you to follow through in actually going public with your writing, to actually reach the audiences you have worked so hard to persuade. Of course, how you go public with your writing will depend on all the pieces of the rhetorical situation puzzle you have already planned for: your audience, genre, purpose, and context. When I teach public writing through business letters, I have a letter mailing party in class where I bring envelopes and stamps (and cookies!); students write in the addresses, sign their letters, and mail them off. Whether it's "snail mail" or email, posting a public flyer or publishing a blog post, I challenge you to circulate your message and reach your public audience.

Of course, circulating your writing within some public spheres could be risky, and you should think about the implications of "going public" with your writing. For example, maybe you have taken up the cause of LGBTQ+ rights in your public writing, telling a personal story of your experiences with coming out to be persuasive. If you were not yet ready to tell your family about your sexual orientation but decided to publish your writing on Facebook—and you have family members as Facebook friends—that may put you in a tricky situation. Many of us have become careful with curating our social media audiences, but you have to be equally mindful in other publication venues—maybe your editorial in the school newspaper stating your views about the death penalty will cause you to lose credibility or friendships. In some cases, you may feel so strongly committed that the rewards of publishing your positions outweigh other risks, but you should take a moment to assess the ways your issue, audience, genre, and publication venue are all interconnected within the complexities of your public rhetorical situation.

Conclusion

In the article "Going Public" by Peter Mortensen, I have a favorite passage that I often call to mind when I am writing for a public audience: "we must go public. And we can" (182). Mortensen is asking writing studies researchers to write for increasingly public audiences "outside the profession, beyond the academy" (182); he's asking his colleagues to embrace the role of public intellectual that I mentioned at the start of this essay. What I love about the line is how it communicates in just a few words the necessity, urgency, and possibility that comes with public writing. Whether you are a university researcher used to writing to other researchers or a first-year college student used to writing only for your teachers, writing for pub-

lic audiences and in public genres can seem daunting, but, as Mortensen reminds us, we must go public, and we can. As academic citizens of the world, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to the publics around us to use writing to improve our communities and address injustices. Not every piece of writing that goes public will change the world, and we often do not get to see an immediate impact; indeed, the kind of social change that addresses deep injustices often takes time and far-reaching efforts beyond a single email or blog post, but these small rhetorical acts can begin to gather momentum and move toward change in small steps.

When you arrive at your graduation day, I hope you will recall what it means to be an academic citizen. Listen for the moment just before the commencement speaker has you move your tassel from the right to the left. They will confer your degree and say: "with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities appertaining thereto." In the celebration of your accomplishments, remember that obtaining a higher education is a privilege that comes with responsibilities to your community and society. Being an academic citizen simply means using your education for good in the world, and public writing can help you accomplish those goals.

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Teacher Resources for Public Writing for Social Change

"Public Writing for Social Change" represents a compilation of my best advice for students who are writing for public audiences and contexts based on the lessons I've learned from teaching public writing for over 15 years. Public writing assignments require rhetorical sophistication, genre awareness, and targeted research toward a specific audience, context, and exigence. The essay addresses some of the common pitfalls I have seen from students who struggle with public writing, such as choosing an issue that does not have a public exigence, conceiving of one's audience too broadly, or not following through by actually "going public" with their writing.

Even with the many benefits, assigning public writing can be tricky if the goals of one's writing courses or programs are solely based within academic writing styles and genres. Without delving too deeply into the perennial debates about what the "content" of first-year composition courses should be, I would like to encourage instructors interested in teaching public writing but also concerned about preparing students to write for academic purposes and contexts to situate and frame the public writing you assign within the academic goals of your courses. Public writing pedagogies are deeply enmeshed with academic literacies, such as research skills, clarity and coherence in communication, having a clear thesis or main idea, and supporting one's argument with convincing evidence. To meet the needs and expectations of writing programs, students, and the broader academic community, you may need to make these connections between academic and public writing explicit, while also highlighting how the differences between them can help develop rhetorical sophistication as students shift from one style to the next.

An ideal way to build into your course design this lesson about the relationship between academic and public writing is to preface a public writing assignment with a more traditional academic writing assignment. For example, when I assign public business letters on social justice issues, students first conduct academic research on the issue in advance, and I have, in some courses, assigned an academic research essay, rhetorical analysis, and/or annotated bibliography as the project immediately preceding the public writing assignment. I have also taught public writing as part of a "remix" or "re-mediation" project after a research essay; in this scenario, students transform their traditional research essay into a public and/or digital, multimodal piece of writing. Students have to consider how a change from academic to public audience, purpose, genre, and/or context might

impact their argument, evidence, or approach to persuasion and rhetorical appeals. Yet another course progression I have used starts with the personal, then moves to the academic, and ends with the public, asking students to hone and develop their rhetorical understanding with each assignment. Ideally, students pull a thread of personal interest from the first assignment (a literacy narrative, for instance), then conduct academic research on the topic and write in an academic genre, and, finally, situate that personal topic as a public issue to then use a mix of personal and academic research to persuasively argue one's stance to an audience who can effect change.

I continue to teach public writing because of the powerful ways it bridges academic literacies with civic purposes to address social justice issues—all within public genres that will serve students in their careers and lives post-graduation. I hope this essay offers support for you to pursue this pedagogical work, too.

Discussion Questions

1. The opening of this chapter asks "Can a tweet—a genre of public writing—cause social change?" Read Malcolm Gladwell's article "Small Change: Why the Revolution Won't Be Tweeted" and offer your reaction to Gladwell's perspective. Do you think social media writing—like Twitter or Facebook posts—as a kind of public writing can lead to meaningful social change? Give examples from current events and/or your life experiences to support your stance.

2. Based on the brainstorming you did in Table 1, how would you define an "academic citizen" in your own words? Can you think of any examples of academic citizens or public intellectuals from popular culture or from among your teachers or peers? What do those individuals do that make them academic citizens or public intellectuals in your view?

3. Try the invention activity "Writing on Location," and then write a reflection about your experience. What was your reaction to writing on location—helpful, distracting, surprising, upsetting, exciting, a mix of reactions? What ideas, writing, pictures did you create that may be useful in your public writing assignment? How might you use those items in your public writing?

4. The section of the essay on "publics" highlights debates among public sphere theories about whether there is a singular public sphere or whether there are multiple publics and counterpublic spheres. What is your opinion in this debate? Give examples from your experiences or from public culture to support your position.

5. What have been your prior experiences with writing in digital public spaces, and what have you learned about writing in general from writing in digital contexts? Give a specific example from your experience, such as posting to a social media site or commenting on a website, and explain what unique considerations you had to account for in terms of the style of your writing, how you conceived of audience, the type of writing, or the context in which it was publicly viewable. How was this writing similar to the writing you do for school? How was it different?

6. This essay invites you to "go public" by publishing and/or circulating your writing to reach an audience who can effect change. Brainstorm a list of possibilities for going public with your writing; include a mix of digital and print publishing contexts and consider how to circulate (i.e., distribute or share) your writing with others. For example, you could "publish" your writing by printing it to a flyer, but you would need to consider where to post or hand out your flyer to "circulate" it to your targeted audience.

13 Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres

Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, and Christine M. Tardy

Overview

When approaching new genres, students often wonder what kind of information to include and how.* Rhetorical moves analysis, a type of genre analysis, offers a useful, practical approach for students to understand how writers achieve their goals in a genre through various writing strategies. In this chapter, we introduce students to moves analysis, first describing what it is and then explaining various strategies for analyzing moves. The chapter walks students through moves analysis with both a familiar low-stakes genre (student absence emails) and a less familiar professional genre (grant proposals), demonstrating how such an analysis can be carried out. The goal of the chapter is to familiarize students with rhetorical moves analysis as a practical tool for understanding new genres and for identifying options that can help writers carry out their goals.

If you are like most students, you've probably had to miss a class at some point. Maybe you were sick, stayed up too late the night before, or just weren't prepared. When you've found yourself in this situation, have you emailed your professor about your absence? If so, how much information did you share? Did you include an apology, or maybe an explanation of how you plan to make up any missed work?

You may not realize it, but the email written to a teacher in this situation can be considered a *genre*. You've probably heard the term *genre* used in relation to music, film, art, or literature, but it is also used to describe non-literary writing, like the writing we do in our personal lives, at school,

and at work. These genres can be thought of as *categories of writing*. These categories are based on what the writing is trying to *do*, as well as who it is written for and the context it is written in (Dirk; Miller). For instance, a condolence card or message carries out the action (or goal) of sharing your sympathy with someone. A student absence email lets a teacher know about an absence and might also request information for how to make up a missed class.

You encounter many genres every day. In your personal life, these might include to-do lists, menus, political ads, and text messages to schedule a get-together. In school, you may write in genres like proposals, lab reports, and university admission essays. People in professions often write in highly specialized genres: nurses write care plans; lawyers write legal briefs; scientists write research articles, and so on. (For a more in-depth introduction to the definition and functions of genre, check out Dirk's "Navigating Genres" chapter in *Writing Spaces Vol. 1*.)

Texts within a genre category aren't identical, but they often resemble each other in many ways. For example, they might use similar kinds of vocabulary and grammar, design features, content, and patterns for organizing their content. Because of these resemblances, we can often recognize texts as belonging to a particular genre—as in figure 1.

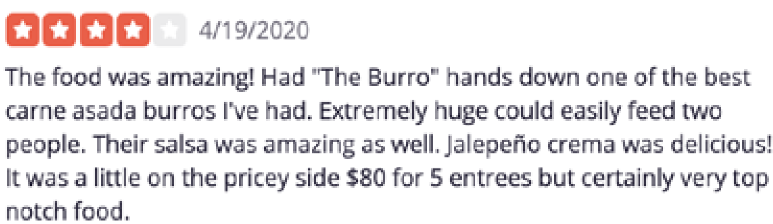


Figure 1: Four-star restaurant review of Boca Tacos & Tequila, posted April 19, 2020. Text reads: "The food was amazing! Had 'The Burro' hands down one of the best carne asada burros I've had. Extremely huge could easily feed two people. Their salsa was amazing as well. Jalepeño crème was delicious! It was a little on the pricey side $80 for 5 entrees but certainly very top notch food." *Yelp*; Yelp.com, 19 Apr. 2020, https://www.yelp.com/biz/boca-tacos-y-tequila-tucson

If you recognized this text as a consumer restaurant review, you likely have read similar reviews before, and you've started to get a sense of what they "look like." This is how genres work: When we repeatedly encounter texts within a genre, we get a sense of the language and content they tend to use, as well as how they arrange that language and content. Successful

writers have a good idea of how to write effectively in particular genres—this means satisfying readers' expectations for the genre but maybe also making a text fresh and interesting. Can you think of a time you had to write in a new or unfamiliar genre for the first time? You might have gotten stuck with where to start or what to include. Writing in a new genre can be hard if you don't yet know the expectations for content, language, and organization. In this chapter, we'll share a specific strategy that can help you through these kinds of challenges. More specifically, we will look at how to identify and analyze the *rhetorical moves* of a genre.

What Are Rhetorical Moves?

Most likely, the term *rhetorical moves* is new to you. It may sound intimidating, but it's just a (sort of) fancy phrase to describe something you probably already do. Rhetorical moves—also just called *moves*—are the parts of a text that carry out specific goals; they help writers accomplish the main action of the genre (Swales). For example, a typical wedding invitation in the United States includes moves like *inviting* ("You are invited to attend…") and *providing venue information* ("...at the Tucson Botanical Gardens"). These moves are necessary to carry out the genre's main action; without an *inviting* move, an invitation could easily fail to accomplish its goal, and without a *providing venue information* move, attendees won't know where to go! A wedding invitation can also include optional moves like *recognizing parents* ("Jordan and Jaime Taylor request your company at…") or *signaling appropriate attire* ("Black tie optional"). Optional moves often respond to specific aspects of a situation or give writers a way to express certain identities or personal goals. Wedding invitations in different countries or cultural communities can have different common moves as well. In China, for example, wedding invitations often include the character for *double happiness* (囍).

Even a text as short as a restaurant review can include multiple moves. The main action of a restaurant review is to tell other people about the restaurant so that they can decide whether to eat there or not, so the moves that a writer includes work toward that goal. The review in Figure 1 includes three moves:

- evaluating the restaurant overall ("The food was amazing!")
- evaluating specific dishes ("...one of the best carne asada burros I've had…," "Their salsa was amazing...")

- providing details about the price ("It was a little on the pricey side…")

After looking at just *one* restaurant review, we don't really know if these are typical moves or if they are just unique to this one consumer's review. To understand what moves are *common* to consumer restaurant reviews (which might be a bit different than professional restaurant reviews), we need to look at many examples of texts in that genre. As a writer, it can be very useful to look for moves that are required (sometimes called *obligatory moves*), common, optional, and rare. You can also think about moves that never seem to occur and consider why that might be the case. For example, have you ever seen a wedding invitation mention whether this is someone's second (or third) marriage? Or that mentions how much the wedding is going to cost? Those particular moves would probably confuse some readers and *not* help achieve the goal of the genre!

Analyzing Rhetorical Moves

Analyzing rhetorical moves is the process of identifying moves in multiple samples of a genre, looking for patterns across these texts, and thinking critically about the role these moves play in helping the genre function. To get started with moves analysis, you just need a few strategies we'll show you throughout the rest of this chapter. We ourselves have used these strategies in situations where we had to write in unfamiliar genres. As a new professor, Madelyn recently had to write her first annual review report—a document used to track her career progress. The instructions she was given were a bit vague and confusing, so she gathered samples of annual reviews from her colleagues to get a better sense of the typical length and type of content included in this genre. One sample she looked at used an elaborate chart, which made her quite nervous because she had no idea how to make this kind of chart for her own report! But after realizing that this chart was not included in the other samples, she decided this move was probably optional and decided to not include it. In this case, understanding the typical moves of the annual review report helped Madelyn avoid unnecessary stress and feel confident her report would meet readers' expectations.

Before trying to figure out a complicated or unfamiliar genre, it will help to practice first with something familiar like a student absence email. Having received hundreds of these emails as professors (and written a few ourselves), we know this genre is characterized by some typical rhetorical

moves as well as a great deal of variation. Let's walk through the process of carrying out a rhetorical moves analysis.

Identifying Typical Moves of a Genre

The emails in Table 1 were all written by college students (referred to here by pseudonyms). We only share four samples here, but it's better to gather 5-10 or even more samples of a genre to really get a sense of common features, especially when you are working with a more complex or unfamiliar genre. To identify typical rhetorical moves, first, you'll want to identify the moves in each individual text you collect. Remember that a move is a part of the text that helps the writer carry out a particular function or action. For this reason, it is helpful to label moves with a verb or an "action" word. When you sense that the writer is doing something different or performing a new "action," you've probably identified another rhetorical move. A move can be one sentence long, an entire paragraph, or even longer, and your interpretation of a move might differ from someone else's interpretation. That's okay!

Rhetorical moves in four sample absence emails

Sample 1

Dear Dr. Pawlowski,

[1] I just wanted to tell you that I will be absent from class today. [2] I have completed my mid-term evaluation and I have started my annotated bibliography. If I have any other questions I will ask my study partner! [3] Thank you, and I will see you on Friday!

Sincerely,

Jay Johnson

Sample 2

Dear Professor,

[1] I am sorry but [2] today I am missing class [3] because I have to take my cat to the vet due to an emergency. [4] Could you let me know what I need to do to make up the missed material?

[5] Thank you for your understanding,

Layla

Sample 3

Good morning,

I hope you had a wonderful spring break. [1] I am still experiencing cold symptoms from the cold I caught during the start of spring break. It was mainly from digestive problems (bathroom issues) coming from medication that [2] I had trouble coming to class yesterday. [3] I would like to apologize for any inconvenience I might have caused.

[4] I am continually working on the final assignment that is due tomorrow. [5] If I am not able to turn it in on time, could I possibly have a 24 hour extension? If not, I understand. [6] Thank you as always and I hope to see you tomorrow.

Best Wishes,

Corey M.

Sample 4

Hi,

[1] Sorry but [2] I won't be in class today.

Ali

Look at how we labeled the moves in these four samples. We did this by first reading each sample individually and thinking about how different parts achieve actions. We then labeled these parts with verb phrases to describe the writer's moves. In some texts, multiple sentences worked together to help the writer accomplish a particular goal, so we grouped those sentences together and labeled them as a single move (notice move 2 in Sample 1). Sometimes we found that a single sentence helped to accomplish multiple goals, so we labeled multiple moves in a single sentence (notice Sample 4). Don't worry if you feel like you aren't locating the "right" moves or labeling them appropriately; this is not an exact science! You might choose different labels or identify more or fewer moves than someone else analyzing the same samples. To find a fitting label for a move, it's helpful to ask, "What is the writer *doing* in this part of the text?" To keep consistency in your labeling, it might also help to ask, "Have I seen something like this before in a different sample?" Looking at how we labeled the moves, would you agree with our labels? Do you see any additional moves? Would you have broken up the samples differently?

After identifying moves in individual samples, the next step is to compare the samples, looking for similarities and differences to better under-

stand what moves seem typical (or unusual) for the genre. Based on our labels in Table 1, what moves do you see most and least frequently? A table is useful for this step, especially when you are working with longer or more complex genres and want to visualize the similarities and differences between samples. In Table 2, we listed all of the moves found in the four samples, noted which samples included each move, and decided whether each move seemed obligatory, common, optional, or rare for this particular genre based on how often it appeared. If we noticed the move in every sample, we labeled it as "obligatory," but if we only saw a move in one or two samples, we figured it might be more optional or rare. We need to be careful, however, about making definite conclusions about what is or is not a typical feature of a genre when looking at such a small set of texts. We would probably locate many more moves or develop a different analysis with a larger sample size. Nevertheless, check out our findings in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparing moves across samples

Move	S. 1	S.2	S. 3	S. 4	Obligatory, common, optional, or rare?
Informing the teacher that an absence occurred/will occur	✓	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Apologizing for absence		✓	✓	✓	Common
Explaining reason for absence		✓	✓		Common
Requesting an accommodation			✓		Optional or rare
Requesting information about missed material		✓			Optional or rare
Taking responsibility for missed work	✓		✓		Common
Expressing gratitude	✓	✓	✓		Common

Understanding How Moves Help Carry out the Genre's Social Actions

We now want to consider *how* certain moves help the genre function. Start by asking yourself, "What does the genre help the readers and writers *do?*"

and "How do certain moves help carry out these actions?" Keep in mind that a genre may serve multiple purposes. You might send an email to excuse yourself from an upcoming class, to explain a previous absence (see Sample 3), ask questions about missed material (see Sample 2), to request an extension on an assignment (see Sample 3), and so on.

Based on Table 1, at least one move could be considered essential for this genre because it is found in all four samples: informing the instructor about an absence. This move helps the writer make the *purpose* of the email explicit. Sometimes this simple announcement is almost all that an absence email includes (see Sample 4). Can you imagine trying to write an absence email without mentioning the absence? Would such an email even belong in this genre? Along with a general announcement of the absence, students often include information about when the absence occurred or will occur, especially if they need more information about missed material.

Some of the moves we labeled as optional or rare in Table 2 are not necessarily ineffective or inappropriate, but they might not always be needed depending on the writer's intentions or the context of the missed class. Sample 2 includes a request for information about missed material, and Sample 3 includes a request for an accommodation. Do the emails with requests leave a different impression than the samples without? Do the writers of requests carry them out in similar ways?

We could continue going through each move, looking for patterns and considering rhetorical effects by asking a) why each move is typical or not, b) what role each move plays in carrying out the genre's purpose(s), and c) how and why moves are sequenced in a particular way.

Identifying Options and Variations in Moves

Variation across genre samples is likely to occur because of differences in context, audience, and writers' preferences. But some genres allow for more variation than others. If you've ever written a lab report, you likely received very specific instructions about how to describe the materials and methods you used in an experiment and how to report and discuss your findings. Other school genres, like essays you might write in an English or Philosophy course, allow for more flexibility when it comes to both content and structure. If you notice a lot of variation across samples, this might mean that the genre you are looking at is flexible and open to variations, but this could also indicate that you need to label the moves more consistently or that you are actually looking at samples of different genres.

Based on our observations and analysis, the student absence email appears to have some degree of flexibility in both content and organizational

structure. There is variation, for example, in how *detailed* the students are in providing a reason for their absence. Sample 2 mentions an emergency vet visit, providing just enough detail to show that the absence was justifiable and unexpected. Sample 3 also includes an explanation for the absence, but the writer chose to include a far more personal and detailed reason (a cold caught on spring break and bathroom issues from medication? Perhaps TMI (too much information)?). There is also a great deal of variation in the structure of the emails or the sequence of moves. In Sample 3, the student doesn't mention their absence until the third sentence whereas all the other writers lead with this information. What other differences do you see? How do you think a professor would respond to each email? Understanding your options as a writer and learning how to identify their purposes and effects can help you make informed choices when navigating a new or unfamiliar genre.

Identifying Common Language Features

Writers make linguistic choices to carry out moves, and oftentimes you'll find similarities across samples of a genre. While there are seemingly infinite features of language we could analyze, here are some to consider:

- verb tense
- passive/active voice
- contractions (e.g., it's, I'm, we're, you've)
- sentence types
- sentence structures
- word choice
- use of specialized vocabulary
- use of pronouns

To dig deeper into the linguistic features of moves, we could take a few different approaches. First, we could view the genre samples side-by-side and look for language-level patterns. This method works well when your genre samples are short and easy to skim. We noticed, for example, that all four student absence emails use first-person pronouns (*I, me, my, we, us*), which makes sense given that this genre is a type of personal correspondence. Would it be possible to write in this genre *without* using personal pronouns?

Our analysis could also focus on how language is used to carry out a single move across genre samples. Using this method, we noticed that in both of the samples that included requests to the teacher, the students use

the auxiliary verb *could* to make their requests. In Sample 2, Layla asks, "Could you let me know what I need to do to make up the missed material?" In Sample 3, Corey asks, "Could I possibly have a 24-hour extension?" There are other possibilities for phrasing both questions more directly, such as "What do I need to do?" or "Can I have a 24-hour extension?" Why might it be beneficial to phrase requests indirectly in this genre?

You don't need to be a linguistic expert to analyze language features of a genre. Sometimes all it takes is noticing a word that seems out of place (like the use of the greeting "Hi" instead of "Dear Professor") or finding a phrase that is repeated across genre samples. Or you might start with a feeling you get while reading samples of a genre: the samples might generally feel formal or you might notice a humorous tone. Noticing language features helps you more closely analyze *how* certain moves are carried out and *to what effect.*

Critiquing Moves

To critique means to offer a critical evaluation or analysis. By critiquing a genre, we are doing more than identifying its faults or limitations, though that can certainly be part of the process. We might also look for potential strengths of the genre and possibilities for shifting, adapting, or transforming it. The use of the greeting "Hi" in Sample 4 could be an interesting start to a critique about how formal this genre is or should be. While we understand why some professors find it too informal to be addressed with a "Hi" or "Hey," we also see this move as evidence of how the genre's norms and expectations are seemingly changing. We personally don't find these greetings as jarring or inappropriate as we might have 5-10 years ago. Our reactions might have to do with our individual teaching styles, but email etiquette may also be changing more broadly. To pursue this line of inquiry, we could collect more samples of student emails written to other professors and maybe even talk to those professors about their reactions to informal email greetings. Or we could talk to students about why they choose to use formal or informal greetings in these emails. To conduct a critique or analysis of a genre, it is sometimes useful to gather more samples or more information about the context in which the genre is used. Talking to actual users of the genre is often especially useful (see how Brad's students did this in the next section). Here are some questions to get you started on a critique of rhetorical moves (some have been adapted from Devitt, et al.'s *Scenes of Writing*):

- Do all moves have a clear purpose and help carry out the social actions of the genre?
- What is the significance behind the sequence of the moves?
- What are consequences for the writer or other users if certain moves are included, or not?
- Who seems to have freedom to break from common moves? Who does not?
- What do the moves suggest about the relationship between the writers and users of this genre? How might this relationship impact the inclusion/exclusion of certain moves?
- What do the moves suggest about the values of a broader community (i.e. a specific class, a specific institution, or the entire educational system of the region)?

A critique of moves might also lead you to find ways to express your own identity or bend more traditional conventions of a genre. For example, U.S. wedding invitations traditionally included a move which recognized the parents of the bride as the hosts of the wedding (e.g., "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith request the pleasure of your company at the marriage of their daughter [bride] to [groom]"). A critique of this move shows that it reflects a more gender-biased social view, in which a female is given to a male by her parents. Today, many (perhaps even most) couples omit this move entirely.

Applying Moves Analysis: Writing a Statement of Need

Moves analysis can help as you write in different classes or other personal or professional situations. Let's take a look at how we can use moves analysis to approach a complicated or unfamiliar genre. You can use the chart in the Appendix as you follow along.

In one of Brad's writing courses, students used moves analysis when they wrote a grant proposal on behalf of a local nonprofit organization. Grant proposals are common in academic and professional contexts. The goal of a grant proposal (the action it hopes to accomplish) is to convince a funder to support a project or initiative financially. In other words, "give us money!" Each granting agency—the organization with the money—has its own expectations in terms of format, organization, and even word count for proposals, but most include similar sections: a Statement of Need, Objectives for the project, Methods of implementing, Evaluation, and a proposed Budget ("How Do I Write a Grant Proposal?"). We can't discuss

all of these sections here, so in these next few paragraphs, we'll walk you through a brief moves analysis of just the Statement of Need section (we'll call it the Statement), just as Brad's students did.

First, we need to understand what the Statement is hoping to accomplish and why it is important. According to Candid Learning, a support website for grant seekers, a Statement "describes a problem and explains why you require a grant to address the issue" ("How Do I Write"). This section lays out the stakes of the problem and proposes the solution. To learn more about how these Statements work, Brad's class reviewed several samples from Candid Learning's collection of successful grant proposals ("Sample Documents"). Let's take a look at some of the moves students identified in three samples. These proposals were requesting funds for educational development in Uganda (Proposal from Building Tomorrow), an interpreter training center (Proposal from Southeast Community College), and community-based art programming (Proposal from The Griot Project).

Identifying Typical Moves in Statements of Need

First, Brad and his students identified moves in the individual Statements, using verbs to describe them. Then, we compared moves across the samples. Here are three of the moves we found:

Connect Proposal to Broad Social Issue

The writers included statistics or other data from credible sources as a way to establish the need or problem and connect to broader societal issues. Here are a few examples of this move in action:

- UNICEF and USAIDS estimate that 42 million children in this region alone are without access to primary education. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)
- A study, published in January of 2006 in the journal Pediatrics shows that ad hoc interpreters were much more likely than professionally trained interpreters to make errors that could lead to serious clinical consequences, concluding that professionally trained medical interpreters are essential in health care facilities. (Proposal from Southeast Community College)

Why do you think the writers reference respected sources, like UNICEF, USAIDS, and the journal *Pediatrics*? Brad's students thought this move could both help the grant writer build credibility with their reader and show how the project will impact a social problem that goes beyond

their local context. We did not see this move in all of the samples, so we'd say this move is *common* but not necessarily obligatory for this genre.

Demonstrate Local Need

Grant writers have to show the local problem their project is going to solve and why it's needed. For example:

- Officials in the Wakiso District of Uganda...estimate that 55% of the district's 600,000 children do not have access to education. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)
- Statewide, 143,251 people speak a language other than English at home. In Lancaster County, that number is 24,717, up 260% since 1990 (U.S. Census 1990, 2000, 2005). (Proposal from Southeast Community College)
- As community constituents, we have observed a lack of after school and summer enrichment projects that utilize the power of art as a means of community unification. (Proposal from The Griot Project)

Students decided this move is *obligatory* because it's in all of the samples. This makes sense because grant writers need to show why their project is important. Referencing outside sources appears to be *common* within this move, but not required. Why do you think referencing outside sources could be effective, given this move's role in the genre?

Identify Solution and/or Impact

At some point in the Statement, usually at the end, the grant writer explains how their proposed project will meet the need they identified:

> By opening doors to new, accessible neighborhood classrooms, BT can help reduce the dropout rate, provide children with the opportunity to receive a valuable education, and be an instrumental partner in building a better tomorrow. (Proposal from Building Tomorrow)

Brad's students noticed this move in all of the Statements. Why do you think this move seems to be *obligatory*?

Understanding How Moves Help Carry out the Genre's Social Actions

Given what we know about grant proposals and the Statement, these moves seem to be rhetorically effective when sequenced in the order described above: connect to a societal problem, demonstrate local need, and identify a solution or describe the impact of the proposed project. Using these three basic moves helps writers show that their proposed work is important and that they have a plan to solve a problem with the grant money. Understanding the Statement in this way led Brad's students to conduct further research into issues like food scarcity and access to health care that affected their partner organizations so they could make connections to social issues in their Statements.

Identifying Options and Variations in Moves

The three moves identified were used in most of the grant proposals Brad's students read. But students did notice variation. Remember that even when moves seem obligatory or common, they won't necessarily be found in the same order. For example, one proposal identified the local need before connecting to a broader issue, and The Griot Project's proposal did not include the *connecting* move at all, instead focusing solely on local knowledge to make their case. Why do you think this might be? Here, it may help to learn more about the audience. The Griot Project's grant proposal was submitted to Neighborhood Connections, an organization that provides "money and support for grassroots initiatives in the cities of Cleveland and East Cleveland." When the grant writers say, "As community constituents, we have observed…," they are localizing their efforts and showing how their project can be considered a "grassroots initiative." Understanding the audience can be one factor in understanding variation among samples.

Identifying Common Language Features

When students looked across the samples, they noticed personal pronouns like *I*, *we*, or *us* were *optional* or *rare*. In fact, the only personal pronoun was in the *demonstrating local need* move, where one organization referenced their own observation ("we have observed") to demonstrate the local need. However, they shifted back to third person when *identifying the impact* ("the Griot Project will improve"), like the other samples. Why do you think the writers included themselves so explicitly in the text when *demonstrating the local need*, while the rest of the samples maintained a more distant position? What might be gained with this choice, and why

might some writers hesitate? Why do you think all of the writers used third person pronouns when *identifying the organization's impact*?

Students also noticed a common sentence structure in the *identifying* move, which we called *"By x-ing."* Each of the grant writers used a single sentence and a *By x-ing* phrase to connect the proposed intervention to an outcome. For example, "*By opening* doors...BT can help reduce the dropout rate…" (emphasis added). Why do you think this sentence structure seems to be common within this move?

Critiquing Moves

Staff members from an organization supporting economic development on Native American sovereign lands reminded members of Brad's class that writing a grant proposal means representing an organization and the people and communities it serves. With this in mind, they asked students to emphasize the resilience of the community rather than perpetuate negative stereotypes in the grant proposals; they didn't want a pity campaign. As a result of this conversation, students decided to highlight local conditions like a lack of grocery stores and access to transportation before introducing statistics about obesity and diabetes rates. They also included pictures of happy families to counter stereotypical images of poverty. In this way, critique of the genre led to subtle, yet important, transformation.

Clearly, a moves analysis like this could go on for a while! Remember, we're not looking for the "right" answer—we're trying to understand the options that we have as we begin to contribute our own examples to the genre.

Producing and Transforming Genres using Moves Analysis

Carrying out a moves analysis is more than just an academic exercise. You can use this process whenever you need to write in a new genre. Maybe you are applying for summer internships and you are writing a cover letter for the first time. Instead of starting from what you *think* a cover letter might look like, you can find several samples and conduct a moves analysis to identify features of this genre. You might also want to try pushing the boundaries a bit. Sometimes, playing with moves or incorporating additional moves in a genre can lead to interesting innovations or new uses for a genre. For each writing situation, you'll want to decide whether it makes sense to take some risks and be innovative or to stick with more

typical approaches. Conducting a moves analysis can be your first step to considering how to carry out your goals, and maybe even expressing your individuality, in a new genre.

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Appendix Guiding Questions for Analyzing and Using Rhetorical Moves

Appendix
Guiding Questions for Analyzing and Using Rhetorical Moves

Identifying typical moves A "move" is a part of the text that helps the writer carry out a particular function or action. Label moves with a verb or an "action" word.	Which moves seem obligatory or necessary to achieve the genre's action(s)? Which moves seem common, but not necessary? Which moves seem optional or rare?
Identifying how moves help carry out the genre's actions	How does each move work to achieve the action or goal of the genre? How do the moves work together, given what you know of the typical audience(s), purpose(s), and context(s) of the genre's use?
Identifying options and variations Some genres are rigid, while others are more flexible based on audience, context, or writer's preference	What organizational patterns (sequence, order) do you notice among the moves? How do different audiences or contexts seem to affect the moves? How do writers use language?
Identifying common language features We often find similarities in linguistic choices within genres and/or moves. Try comparing entire texts (if short) or particular move across samples	How is language used to carry out the moves you've identified? Consider examining: ● verb tense (present, past, future) ● passive/active voice ● contractions (e.g. it's, I'm, we're, you've) ● sentence types punctuation ● word choice ● use of specialized vocabulary ● use of pronouns ● sentence structures
Critiquing rhetorical moves Try to identify strengths and limitations of the genre, as well as possibilities to shift, adapt, or transform it	Do all moves have a clear purpose and help carry out the social actions of the genre? What is the significance behind the sequence of the moves? What are consequences for the writer or other users if certain moves are included, or not? Who seems to have freedom to break from common moves? Who does not? What do the moves suggest about the relationship between the writers and users of this genre? How might this relationship impact the inclusion/exclusion of certain moves? What do the moves suggest about the values of a broader community (i.e. a specific class, a specific institution, or the entire educational system of the region)?

Teacher Resources for Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres

Overview and Teaching Strategies

Rhetorical moves analysis is an adaptable strategy for analyzing, producing, and transforming genres. In this chapter, we walk students through an inductive process that makes visible the ways language choices and writing strategies like *organization* or *structure* are connected to the social action of a given genre. Moves analysis is thus a teaching strategy that can help demystify how writing works. Students do not need to have in-depth knowledge of genre theory to conduct a moves analysis, but it will be important for them to understand the concept of genre as social action. This chapter will work well paired with Kerry Dirk's "Understanding Genres" in *Writing Spaces*, volume 1, and/or Dan Melzer's "Understanding Discourse Communities" in volume 3. Connections can also be made to Mike Bunn's "Reading Like a Writer" in volume 2.

In a sense, conducting a moves analysis in a writing class is similar to what writers at all levels do all the time: gather some samples of work we find effective, try to figure out what specifically makes the samples effective, and then do those things (or transform them) in our own writing. Moves analysis is a flexible strategy that can be introduced when students begin reading a new genre or during their writing process. Christine likes to introduce moves analysis with short familiar genres (like the student absence email example in this chapter), and then return to moves analysis throughout a course when students approach a new genre. Madelyn uses moves analysis to help students identify obligatory, common, optional, and rare genre features as a way of collaboratively negotiating assignment guidelines and expectations, and identified moves become a part of the assessment criteria for student work in a given genre. Brad likes to use moves analysis after students have already written a first draft. After conducting the moves analysis in small groups and identifying some of the obligatory, common, and unusual moves as a class, students can then go back to their draft and make choices based on the analysis.

One of the biggest challenges in facilitating moves analysis is selecting sample texts for analysis. The goal is to identify a narrow enough genre that the texts will be relatively similar, but also flexible enough to show variation. For example, in the student absence emails, we are clearly able

to see variation across individual texts, but there are also common moves. If our sample set were broadened to also include faculty absence emails, we would probably start to identify slightly different patterns with moves. Some other shorter examples we've used to introduce moves analysis in class include wedding invitations, thank you notes, mission statements, obituaries, and protest signs, among others. If asking students to select their own samples, it will be important to emphasize the difference between a modality (email) and a genre (student absence email).

We also need to acknowledge the concern that moves analysis can reinscribe a prescriptivism or focus on correctness that the field's pedagogical focus on genre seeks to avoid. However, it's important to recognize that the textual and discursive borrowing that emerges from moves analysis can provide students with effective rhetorical strategies and an entry point to discuss and critique discourses. Focusing discussion on how moves help to achieve an intended action and why particular moves are effective can also help students see the moves as conventions, not rules. The instructor should select a range of effective samples that demonstrate variation, and should identify outliers to raise for discussion. If students look at a range of examples, they are very likely to find variation; therefore, moves analysis can actually help *highlight* variation within a genre and show how writers have options to achieve their aims. Students can also be encouraged to use moves analysis to bend or remix a genre and compare the effects (Tardy). Like many pedagogical strategies, moves analysis can be a tool for reproducing, critiquing, and/or transforming hegemonic writing practices.

Activities and Process

While there are many possible ways to conduct a moves analysis in a class setting, we have generally had success using the following process:

First, conduct a moves analysis of a familiar genre.

The student absence email is our go-to genre because student writers have a close understanding of the rhetorical purposes and it brings some levity to the analysis process. By using the examples in this chapter or drawing on real student emails—anonymous, of course—teachers can also show some outliers or ineffective examples that elicit some knowing nods or laughs. Once students identify the genre, a brief discussion of context can elicit an understanding of the social action of this genre. We begin by modeling the process of moves analysis with one sample, helping students label each

move with *actions*. Then, in small groups, we ask students to identify and analyze the moves in additional samples. We remind students that moves can be a sentence, a paragraph, or even just a few words, and we ask students to name them with a verb. In the absence emails, students will often use descriptive phrases like "why absent" or "apology"; it may be necessary to explicitly teach how to convert these descriptions into action-oriented phrases like, "providing reasons for absence" and "apologizing for absence." In more academic genres, students may fall into generalized terminology like "introduction;" the introduction, however, is usually composed of multiple rhetorical moves (Swales).

After identifying the moves, each small group can share out the moves they identified. It's okay (and expected) that groups will use different terminology. Then, *discuss how these moves facilitate the action of the genre*. What are students generally trying to achieve with these absence emails? How do the typical moves (apologizing, providing reasons, expressing gratitude etc.) help to facilitate this goal? This step—discussing *why* certain moves are used—is essential to helping students see moves as rhetorical rather than simply formal. A critique of the genre's moves can elicit discussion of writer-audience relationship and the embedded power relations of schooling. (We have also found wedding invitations to be an excellent entry point for moves analysis with opportunity for critique and transformation.)

Next, analyze a less familiar genre.

Follow the same procedures to analyze a target genre. It's helpful first to discuss the social action of the genre. For more complex genres, like grant proposals or academic articles, it may also help to focus on specific sections. Limiting the analysis to a specific section of a longer genre can both focus the activity and remind students that different sections or parts of a text can serve different rhetorical purposes. Once a set of moves have been identified in group and class discussion, creating a table of obligatory, common, optional, and rare moves can be helpful for guiding students to their choices. Again, be sure to leave time to discuss how the moves facilitate the action of the genre.

Finally, have students draft or revise using their knowledge of rhetorical moves.

If you typically require students to reflect on their writing, you may ask them to discuss the moves they chose to use (or not), and why they made those choices. Christine likes to have students put in-text comments in

their final drafts identifying their rhetorical moves and explaining their choices for using them (or putting them in a certain order).

Resources and Samples for Moves Analysis

The Statement of Need excerpts provided in the chapter are from sample grant proposals posted to Candid Learning (https://learning.candid.org), a resource site for nonprofit organizations formerly known as GrantSpace. Candid Learning requires registration, but it is free and has a wealth of resources. The three samples shared in this chapter can be found on the sample proposal page: https://learning.candid.org/resources/sample-documents/?tab=tab-fullproposals. Some of these proposals even include feedback from the funder describing why the proposal is effective.

We have also used the WPA/CompPile bibliographies for annotated bibliographies (https://wac.colostate.edu/comppile/wpa/). The Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP) (https://micusp.elicorpora.info/) includes successful student writing in a variety of genres by upper-level undergraduates and graduate students. Former student work can also make for excellent (and varied) samples for moves analysis.

For further discussion on carrying out moves analysis activities, see chapter 2 of Sunny Hyon's *Introducing Genre and English for Specific Purposes* and chapter 4 of Christine M. Tardy's *Genre-Based Writing: What Every ESL Teacher Needs to Know*.

Discussion Questions

1. The authors of this chapter present a brief moves analysis of "student absence emails." Why do you think these moves have become typical of this genre? If you have written a similar email recently, discuss how or if your moves align with the moves described in the chapter. How might your relationship with your professor affect the moves you use in such an email? What other factors might affect your use of different moves, or even your language choices within those moves? How might the moves in an absence email compare to a "grade change request" or an "appointment request" email to a professor?

2. After analyzing student absence emails for moves, write three samples: one that you think is "prototypical" of this genre, one that you think would be *poorly* received by the instructor, and one that is

not standard but would be *especially successful*. What did you learn from writing these samples? How did your moves analysis inform the choices you made in writing?

3. The discussion of the grant proposal Statement of Need suggests that audience awareness is important in deciding which moves may be obligatory and, perhaps, where innovation might be acceptable or even encouraged. What other factors might you consider when determining which moves will be effective in the genre you are writing?

4. Think about a time when you felt like you had to bend or transform the conventions of a genre in order to achieve your purpose. How did you make choices about which moves or conventions were necessary to keep, and which could be adapted?

5. Gather a few samples of a genre from a discourse community you belong to and conduct a brief moves analysis. What is the action this genre carries out and how do the moves help it achieve that action? What can the common moves tell you about how structure and language create and reflect this community?

6. Some genres tend to be more open to variation than others, including in their use of moves. Make a list of genres that you think are more open to variation and those in which bending the norms may be riskier. What kinds of things might affect your choices as a writer to depart from common moves or other features of a genre?

14 Understanding and Maintaining Your Privacy When Writing with Digital Technologies

Lindsey C. Kim

Overview

As our students utilize more networked technologies in their writing, it has become critical that both students and teachers understand the role privacy plays in their digital activity.* This chapter aims to help students understand why privacy is an important concept to consider when writing online and to provide them with the knowledge and strategies necessary to preserve their privacy in digital environments. First, it will offer an explanation of information privacy based on three central concepts: data, agency, and flow. After explaining each of these concepts in detail, it will then turn to a discussion of how students can leverage this knowledge to exert more control over the information they share when composing online.

Before beginning this chapter, I walked into my office at home and shut the door. Had I not done this, writing this chapter would have been quite difficult. Closing my door prevented the variety of interruptions that might disrupt my ability to write, like my young daughter's tendency to find me and demand I sing along with her to her favorite song, or the vibrant conversation that echoes from a family member's Zoom meeting, or even the sound of some breaking development from a news clip on the family television. Closing the door allowed me to create a *private* space, a space where I could focus on my writing relatively

undisturbed. Privacy, in many ways, shapes our writing and our writing processes. Virginia Woolf, in her famous extended essay, *A Room of One's Own*, emphasizes this very connection between privacy and writing. To quote her famous thesis, a woman must have "a room of her own if she is to write" (4). That is, if we want to engage in writing that creates new ideas, arguments, and fictions, privacy is one thing that we need.

Woolf's claim that pairs writing so significantly to privacy was first published in 1929, but it has renewed relevance today, when advances in digital technologies have caused massive reconsideration of what the term "privacy" even means. The digital spaces that we find in our devices or online do not have the same walls as Woolf's room, so it can be difficult to understand precisely what role privacy as a concept plays in digital writing. In order to do so, we have to consider a different way of thinking about privacy: information privacy. This chapter aims to help you understand why the privacy of your personal information and data matters to your online activities. First, it will explain what information privacy is, noting the similarities and differences of information privacy compared to the more common space-based ways of understanding privacy (like Woolf's room or my office). It will present a way of understanding and analyzing information privacy based on three central concepts: data, agency, and flow. After explaining each of these concepts in detail, the chapter will then turn to how you can use these concepts to become more informed about the privacy of your information when using digital products or services, as well as how you can leverage such knowledge to protect your privacy online.

What Is Information Privacy?

When we think of privacy, we most likely think of it in terms of physical space. Certainly Woolf does when she argues for the necessity of a *room* of one's own. When I walk into my bedroom or office and I close the door and shut out potential intrusions or interruptions, I have, to echo Woolf, a space of my own. We can refer to this type of privacy as *spatial privacy*. This way of thinking of privacy is firmly fixed in the way many of us experience the world. I can see or touch physical material, such as land, wood, or concrete, so it is easy to conceptualize and create structures to keep others out, like walls or fences. This notion of privacy is also heavily embedded in U.S. society. Take, for instance, the concept of private property, where people can own land and deny others access to that land. Many U.S. American laws depend on spatial notions of privacy, such as the Sixth Amendment, which protects our homes from "unreasonable searches and

seizures" ("The Bill of Rights," Art. VI). In this way of thinking, a space is private when we are one of a few people (if not the only person) who has access to it. Our private spaces are ones we have control over—we can decide who has access to them and who does not.

We can certainly see echoes of this way of thinking about privacy in our digital spaces. In many ways, our devices have become our digital homes, to which we seek to limit access with security systems and passcodes. Yet this way of understanding privacy is often incompatible with networked activity (or activity that occurs any time you use a device or service that connects to the web). For starters, networked activity requires near constant connection between users, platforms, services, and devices, so the concept of basing privacy purely on limiting access to our devices just does not work. In other words, when we do stuff online, we invite a lot of people and entities to access our devices, and this connection and exchange of information is the driving force of networked activity, thus our understanding of privacy in digital spaces must shift to account for this increased degree of access and interaction. Additionally, digital, rather than physical, infrastructures require us to understand privacy in a new way, because what we are protecting access to is fundamentally different. Instead of being made of dirt, wood, or brick, our digital spaces are composed by code and information. Since our writing, work, and personal activities are happening in networked digital spaces just as much as in physical ones, we need a way of thinking about privacy that addresses this fundamental difference and can offer us better guidance for writing and acting in digital spaces. *Information privacy*, then, switches our focus from spaces to the information that composes digital activity.

Data

Each interaction with a networked technology leaves a trace of your actions in the form of information. John Cheney-Lippold, an expert in digital studies, demonstrates the sheer volume of information that is produced from a single, simple networked action:

> A simple web search from even the most unsophisticated of smart phones generates a lengthy record of new data. This includes your initial search term, the location of your phone, the time and day when you searched, what terms you searched for before/after, your phone's operating system, your phone's IP address, and even what apps you installed on your phone. Add onto this list everything

> else you do with that phone, everything else you do on your computer, everything else that might be recorded about your life by surveilling agents. (4)

These traces of information can be intentional, like when I like a picture or write a tweet. We knowingly produce and put this information out into the web (though we are not always fully aware who will see it). However, oftentimes, we unintentionally or unknowingly create informational traces. For instance, every time I click or visit a website, that visit is recorded, along with a lot of other data about that interaction, such as how long I visited the page, the type of device I am using, my location, etc. This data-about-data is called *metadata* and is the most invisible of the data that we produce online. Often, we pay little attention to our intentional traces of information, and even less to our unintentional ones. However, such data, or the bits and pieces of information we produce through interactions and activities online, are very important because they help to shape the digital environments that we write within.

The data that you produce online is used by companies and platforms to personalize your user experience, from your Google search results, to the products you see on Amazon, to your Netflix queue. Personalization is largely the product of the interpretation of your personal data by *algorithms*. In a sense, these algorithms act as filters, letting through the information they deem appropriate based on your activity and personal information, while blocking out the rest. This highly personalized web of information is what digital activist Eli Pariser calls a "filter bubble" (9). He describes the filter bubble as "your own personal, unique universe of information that you live in online," and it depends on the information gathered about you by the various companies behind the filters (9). Simply put, the information that companies gather about you through your digital activity plays a large role in determining the information and content that you see while on the web.

Your personal information does more than just shape what *you* see online, however. Jessica Reyman, a scholar who studies digital rhetoric and writing, argues that our information helps compose online spaces, services, and platforms. She writes, "With every click and path followed, every status update and tweet entered, every photo and post contributed, every comment, every item tagged, users are collectively producing both the visible and invisible social Web" (514). In other words, through our digital activities we all write the web, at least in a sense. This is important because not only do we influence our digital tools and spaces, but they influence us. I write very differently with a pencil than with a word processor or with

a speech-to-text device. In each of these scenarios, the technology writes *with* me. It is not a unidirectional relationship where I tell the word processor exactly what to write and such is done. In many ways, the word processor itself pushes back, exerting influence on the writing I am producing. An example of this influence is through the grammar and spell checking mechanisms embedded in a word processor. The different-colored squiggly lines exert influence over how I compose, whether it be the red line that compels me to correct my spelling of unidirectional when, in my hasty typing, I accidentally transposed two letters, or the blue line earlier in the document that informed me of my "long sentence" that I should "consider revising." The word processor also impacts my design of this document, as I can only format the text or structure the text in ways that it allows me to. To put it differently, I have agency over these networked technologies, but these technologies also influence me and constrain my agency in certain ways. Given the significance of data to networked activity as well as the significance of digital technologies to our writing and other everyday activities, agency over these aspects thus becomes an incredibly important element of thinking through digital privacy.

Agency

Agency, at its simplest, is the ability to produce an effect through your actions. If you have agency, you are able to exert at least some influence on the happenings around you. In the opening example, I exerted agency over the privacy of my space by closing the door and reducing access to my office. In the context of information privacy, we can think of agency as the ability to affect the collection and use of your personal information, both that which is intentionally and unintentionally produced. Unfortunately, in many instances where we use the web, our agency tends to be limited in both these regards. This lack of agency is due in large part to the fact that we tend to give up control over our data, either knowingly or unknowingly, when we write online. Reyman writes that "when users access, read, network, post, or compose within many online spaces, they are simultaneously giving up information about a wide range of their online activities and, ultimately, giving up control and ownership of their contributions" (514).

Allowing the corporations behind our digital products, services, and platforms such unfettered access to and complete control over the information we produce via our digital activity can cause a variety of problems, especially for your writing. For instance, let's return briefly to the filter bubble concept. If our search queries only return biased results, then we

aren't able to engage in effective argument or discussion. It is hard to engage in any type of dialogue over civic or personal issues when everyone is working from different information. One person could be working with government data, and another could be working from a conspiracy theory. Moreover, filter bubbles can easily become echo chambers, places where we *only* experience content that reaffirms our thoughts and perspectives. As Pariser writes, "By definition, a world constructed from the familiar is a world in which there's nothing to learn. If personalization is too acute, it could prevent us from coming into contact with the mind-blowing, preconception-shattering experiences and ideas that change how we think about the world and ourselves" (15). Personalized information flows like this can be a problem precisely because we have little agency in the matter. We have little to no say in what makes it through the filter (or not). Pariser shares a story of the frustration he experienced when he realized the consequences of this limited agency. Because of his liberal political leanings, he tended to interact more with his progressive or liberal friends' posts on Facebook. Facebook's algorithm prioritized engagement, so his conservative friends began disappearing from his feed. This greatly upset Pariser, who always made it a point to try and interact with different perspectives. But what troubled Pariser most was the fact that he never realized it was happening until it was too late. His data was being used in a way he never consented to, one that actively went against his goals and values, and barring quitting Facebook altogether, there was nothing he could do to change it.

Let's return to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the piece that started our discussion. An (or perhaps *the*) essential message of that piece is that women need private spaces to write because those private spaces grant women relief from the pressure (and pain) of oppressive social and cultural systems. Woolf shares a story about how, when she was visiting a prestigious university that only men could attend, she wandered into a patch of grass, and was immediately accosted by a security guard who harshly instructed her to return to the paths, as women were not permitted off of them. Her identity as a woman, and the biases and prejudices directed toward that identity, resulted in her actions being policed. Much like our physical spaces, our digital spaces too are full of these types of oppressions and biases largely due to the fact that our data is used to ascribe us certain digital identity categories. Cheney-Lippold starts his book on data and identity, "In a database far, far away, you have been assigned a gender, ethnicity, class, age, education level, and potentially the status of parent with x number of children" (3). While this may initially seem harmless, it can be extremely problematic. In 2011, Safia Noble, a researcher and profes-

sional in digital communications, discovered how racism and sexism can be embedded in the algorithms of Google's search function. When looking for some content for her young nieces, she recounts how simply searching for the terms "black girls" resulted in pages of graphic pornography (3). An essential part of the privacy of Woolf's room of her own is that it allows writers to be spared the pressures of social norms and harms of social oppressions. Thus, having the ability to enact agency over our data, to restrict access to it, not only allows us to exert control over the digital spaces we inhabit, but also allows us to distance ourselves from digital structures that may be reproducing and imposing the same harmful prejudices that exist offline.

Flow

To complete our understanding of information privacy, we have to understand how our personal information moves and where it goes. In other words, we have to understand how it flows. Helen Nissenbaum advocates a conception of privacy based on appropriate information flow. According to this way of thinking, information must be shared and is intended to be shared, but the data subjects (or the people who the data is about) have a right to expect it will be shared appropriately. But what does it mean to share something appropriately? Well, according to Nissenbaum, what's appropriate is determined by the situation. To examine a situation to determine what is appropriate flow (and what is not), we can build on the framework that Nissenbaum establishes by asking the following questions about an exchange of information (in physical, textual, or digital contexts):

- What context surrounds the information? What are the norms and structures that govern that context?
- What actors are involved in the situation? That is, who is sharing the information, who is receiving it, and who is the information about?
- What type of information is being shared?
- How might we characterize the sharing that is happening? Is the sharing happening as a gift? An economic exchange? An obligation?
- Are there any rules or constraints regarding how the information is shared?

Consider, for a moment, your educational information (such as your grades, course schedule, etc.). Information describing your educational ac-

tions and history flows within a university *context*. Your educational information flows between various *actors* in these contexts, from professors, to advisors, to registrars, to administrators, and more. Any of these actors can send or receive information about students (who would be the information subject in this instance). It would be inappropriate for your educational information to flow to actors outside the university context. You would not want, say, your dentist, an actor outside the university context, to have access to your educational history. The *type* of information also plays a role in determining if the flow of the information is appropriate or not. Information about your GPA might be more appropriate for some actors, while information about your course schedule might be better suited for others. Because of the way the education system functions, teachers are generally obligated to share grades with students, because otherwise how would students know if they are indeed learning the material and passing the course? Obligation, here, then *characterizes* the type of sharing that's occurring. Finally, FERPA is a law that governs how your educational information is shared. For instance, if you are over 18, there are special forms that must be filled out before instructors can share information regarding your grades with your parents. This law acts as a *constraint* on how the information can be shared (or not).

In digital spaces, where information flow is evitable, Nissenbaum presents a more contextualized version of privacy that proves to be quite useful, especially for analyzing the near constant flow of our information in digital environments. For instance, you might deem it appropriate to give a platform access to your data to help improve your user experience, but find it incredibly invasive and inappropriate for them to share that data with a third party for advertising purposes.

Another aspect of information flow to consider when writing or engaging in any sort of networked activity is the content that flows to you. Many digital spaces and products are designed around attention and engagement, and because of this, many digital products constantly vie for users' attention through a variety of mechanisms, from amplifying sensational or appealing content, as in the case of Pariser's Facebook feed, or via constant notifications. Consider the fact that almost every application you install on your phone asks for one of two things (and often asks for both): access to your information and the ability to send you notifications. Such constant notifications are problematic for writing, as noted in the introduction, as they can easily and quickly become interruptions that divert our attention from our writing. Thus, considering the flow of information and content to you as well as the degree of control you have over that flow

is an important factor in engaging in writing in online spaces (or engaging in any other sort of productive activity online). As demonstrated by my opening example, an essential component of privacy involves the ability to shut out interruptions or intrusions, which we can do through critical consideration of the content and information that flows into our own digital networks and devices.

Maintaining Your Privacy Online

We've discussed three important elements of information privacy and how each relates both to writing with digital technologies and other networked activity. In this final section, we will shift from an examination of information privacy itself to discussing ways to preserve your privacy as you write and act in networked spaces. We will discuss two major aspects of exercising more control over the information you share online: 1) gaining knowledge about a technology or platform's data gathering practices, and 2) using this information to exert the most amount of control over your personal information possible in your writing practices.

First, for technology or platforms that you use often or that gather sensitive data information, you should work to gain a greater understanding of their data practices. You will want to try to discover *what* data is being gathered, *how* it is used, and with *whom* it is shared. Oftentimes, these details can be difficult to research, since the answers can be spread across different texts, obscured through difficult language, or kept hidden via confidentiality or copyright laws, but it is still important to investigate such things to the extent that you can, especially for the technologies that you use regularly. For instance, terms of service agreements or privacy policies often provide a lot of information regarding corporations' data practices. For products that collect a lot of data, you can often find more detailed data use policies, though these documents can be even more technical and difficult to read than terms of service agreements or privacy policies. While these documents can provide general information on companies' data practices, such policies are insufficient in and of themselves, as they only contain information on general practices and can often be written in difficult or inaccessible ways. Plus, there is often a degree of bias with such documents—they are drafted by companies that own and operate the digital service, so there is an increased risk that such documents will obscure or downplay potentially off-putting information. As such, it is always a smart move to triangulate such sources with other sources. A great resource to compare such documents against is ToSDR.org, which stands for "Terms

of Service; Didn't Read" ("Frontpage"). It is an online service where users summarize and rate the policies outlined in terms of service agreements, and offers a glimpse at the digital service's policies from a critical perspective that centers users' needs.

After researching the data gathering practices of different technologies, you can exert agency over the privacy of your data through critical consideration of the digital technologies you use in your writing or other digital activity. There are other online tools you can use to help learn more about a service's data practices, tools that not only inform you but assist you in resisting such data gathering tactics. Ghostery is a browser extension that detects and blocks "thousands of third-party data-tracking technologies – putting control of their own data back into consumers' hands" ("About Ghostery"). Mozilla, the popular web browser, is an internet browser founded on the principles of transparency and open-access, and they have demonstrated a value for users' privacy. They write that "we believe that privacy is fundamental to a healthy internet" and promise to limit their gathering of your personal information only to the data that "serves you in the end" ("Firefox Privacy Notice"). The browser enacts these values by blocking thousands of common web trackers and by offering robust privacy controls so that you can customize what information you want to be available to whom. As mentioned before, this increased level of control and agency is another aspect you want to be on the lookout for when you are determining which devices and services you would like to be a part of your writing process. To gain a better understanding of the degree of control or agency a digital service, platform, or device offers you, examine the default privacy settings of the page. This page also usually offers good information about the flow of data about you as well as the flow of content to you. Services or technologies that are transparent and that offer users more agency in the ways their personal information is shared or in the degree of notifications sent to them are great indicators that those services and technologies can be trusted. Ultimately, these efforts help reduce the information that corporations have about you and your digital activity, which makes it more difficult for them to categorize you, personalize your experience, or intrude upon your digital activity.

Conclusion

If we were to revise Woolf's famous claim to reflect our digital age based on the information presented in this chapter, we might say something like this: People must be able to exercise some control over the flow of their

personal information and data to write with digital technologies. While a statement like this does not speak to all of the complexity of privacy in digital spaces, it does help you start to consider and analyze the role privacy plays in your digital writing and activities. By considering what degree of agency you wield regarding the flow of your personal information and data, you are fostering a more critical orientation toward your own relationship to technology, and both your writing (and personal activities) will benefit from it.

It is important to note that while it is good to develop critical orientations toward the technologies you write with and to gain greater understanding of information privacy, the scope of the issue goes beyond the actions of any individual user, as is common with any sort of complex problem. In other words, the burden of addressing issues of data and information privacy online should not be yours alone. It is simply not feasible. For instance, just reading the privacy policies for every service you use would take you 76 workdays per year, according to a study from 2008 (Reyman 521). Thus, the final, and perhaps most important way to help protect and preserve the privacy of your personal information and data in digital spaces is to advocate for it. However, politics and policymaking tend to be slow businesses, so in the meantime, you can look to the knowledge and skills provided in this chapter to help you out.

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Teacher Resources for Understanding and Maintaining Your Privacy When Writing with Digital Technologies

This chapter aims to introduce students to the concept of information privacy, explain its impact on students' writing, and provide students with knowledge and strategies for regaining control over the information they produce on the Web. Such an essay would complement lessons on digital writing, research, and on critical digital literacies. Networks play a major part in our students' writing practices and in their digital habits, so this chapter can help students gain greater critical awareness of the role that their data plays in forming the web, as well as how it affects their writing. Moreover, it provides vocabulary to understand information privacy and its impact on their writing. This chapter focuses particularly on information privacy as it relates to corporate data-mining practices. It does not offer discussion on other issues that could regulate digital privacy more broadly, such as online harassment or doxxing. Some of the concepts and vocabulary can be applicable to such kinds of privacy invasions, and while the piece at times can gesture broadly to these types of intrusions, its focus remains primarily on data and data-mining since these practices are often less visible to students. Ultimately, these materials (both the chapter and these accompanying resources) aim to help students develop critical orientations toward the digital technologies and services that they integrate into their writing networks and processes.

Here are several discussion questions and in-class activities that can help students practice critically analyzing the data and privacy practices of the technologies they use or that can give them experience in exercising agency in regard to how their personal information is shared when they write online.

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter supplied you with some questions to help you analyze and determine the appropriate flow of information in a given context. Describe a time when you felt your privacy was breached due to inappropriate information flow. Using the questions from the chapter as a guide, explain why the instance was a breach of your privacy. How did the flow go wrong?

2. Current debates regarding privacy and data often involve the data-mining practices of popular social media companies. Pick a popular social media platform, and explain what you consider to be the appropriate flow of your personal information when using that platform. Describe the context of social media, which actors should be involved in the exchange of your personal information, what type(s) of information should be shared, what type of sharing you expect to occur, and whether there are any pertinent rules or norms that shape or constrain how your information is shared.

3. As mentioned in the conclusion to this chapter, while this chapter outlines ways of understanding and maintaining the privacy of your personal information online, there is only so much that one individual can do. Advocacy thus becomes a central part of preserving and shaping digital privacy. What kinds of policies and practices do you think should be implemented to help protect and preserve the privacy of your data and personal information online?

4. The chapter discussed the importance of integrating digital technologies and services that valued privacy, transparency, and offered you more control over the data you produce through your digital activity. Map out your writing "network" for academic writing, including the various digital devices, services, and platforms that you commonly use when writing a research paper for class. Are there any you might want to investigate further in regard to their data practices? Are there items you might rethink or revise after reading this chapter? Why or why not?

Exercises and Activities

Profiling and Revising Privacy Defaults

Pick a popular social media platform, preferably one that you already use, and investigate its default settings for privacy and for sharing information. Consider the implications for these defaults. What kind of information is shared and with whom is it shared? Is any potentially sensitive information shared with any problematic parties? Finally, what kind of revisions would you suggest to the defaults? Create a short presentation that summarizes the default settings, the potential implications of these defaults, and explains how you would revise the defaults so that users have greater control over their personal information and the data they produce.

Analyzing Terms of Service Agreements

Terms of service agreements, privacy policies, and data-use policies are great sites to begin to analyze the privacy practices of a digital service or platform. Yet, they are notoriously hard to understand due to everything from their difficult language and syntax to their length, so few users read them, causing their contents to remain unknown to many. "Terms of Service; Didn't Read" (ToS;DR) is a digital service that summarizes the content of these documents into short bulleted lists that are written in simple language ("Frontpage"). The short summaries also include ratings of the terms according to their fairness to users. Visit the website and review some of the entries. Then locate the entry for a platform or service that you either use or have used. Read both the terms of service agreement for the platform or service as well as the ToS;DR entry. Do you think that the entry accurately represented the terms? Is there anything you would change or include in the entry? For your final task, propose some revisions to the terms of service agreements that would make them more fair to users.

Investigating Your Digital Identity

If you have a Google account, visit your Google Ad settings at www.google.com/settings/u/0/ads to learn more about the data that Google has collected on your activities. How has Google categorized your interests and identity based on its algorithm's interpretation of your data? Do you think their profile presents an accurate picture of you? Why or why not?

15 What Are We Being Graded On?

Jeremy Levine

Overview

Grades are an (often) unmentioned but all-powerful force in the writing classroom. We know that grades mean a great deal to students, motivating many of their decisions in the classroom.* But because grading is uncomfortable and inexact work, we rarely discuss it openly in class — a silence that can leave students in the dark about the standards toward which they should write. This essay is a guide to that imprecision; it seeks to lay out for students the different considerations that go into a grading policy so that they can read assignments and rubrics with a more discerning eye. In showing students the many ways that grading standards shift across writing situations, this essay will help students adjust to new and even unclear sets of standards as well as equip students to assess their own writing on terms other than grades.

I've heard from students over the years about papers they'd been proud of that got bad grades. Usually, these stories involve a lot of time and energy that a student invested in the paper, learning quite a lot along the way and creating something better than they thought they could when they started — only for that work to not be rewarded with a good grade. When I ask my students why they might have gotten the bad grade, they usually say something to the effect of "I didn't write what they were looking for."

After hearing a few of these stories, I decided to try to do something about it. As the writing teacher, I figured that it was my job to help my students understand what their instructors were looking for, which meant showing them what a teacher thinks about when grading writing. To do

this, I decided that we would take a day out of each of our units, right before papers were due, to write our grading rubric as a class. This process would supposedly help students think through the different issues that teachers come across when grading papers, so that they didn't end up with so many grading miscommunications—and it would leave everyone perfectly clear on the standards for that particular essay. Since we were having the conversation at the end of the writing process, we would have a common understanding of what constituted quality for that particular assignment based on what we covered in class. We would quickly arrive at a happy consensus.

It only took two papers for this idea to completely implode. For that second assignment, my students wrote responses to music albums. Each student picked an album they liked and wrote an essay that extended its meaning or put it in a new perspective. It was a vague prompt — my hope was that we would get a bunch of different kinds of papers and everyone would see that each writer in the class had a different writing approach. Even though parts of that assignment idea still hold up, one student from that class explains why these different approaches caused a problem when it came to grading: "I think the main issue with a student-designed rubric was that it wasn't exactly clear what we were supposed to focus on in our writing….There was a lack of direction with the essay that came from the lack of rubric, it was very challenging to write an essay on a vague prompt without a rubric." Based on this student's report, I can see that the students knew that designing the rubric would eventually require us to reach some standards — and writing the paper without knowing the standards would mean that there was a chance that they would do it wrong.

That's exactly what happened. On rubric day, we ended up with a bunch of writing-related words up on the whiteboard ("Style!" "Purpose!" "Audience!" "Organization!"), but no consensus around what counted as success in any of those categories. The different approaches the students took made it impossible to assess everyone's writing fairly under one definition of these words. Some definitions were too narrow, like "a well-organized paper talks about the artist's background first, and then this album specifically," which is not necessarily true. If someone wrote about how the album makes them feel, then the artist's background may not be important. It would be unfair to grade that essay under that definition. On the other side of the spectrum, the definition could also get too broad, like "A well-organized paper is easy to understand." How do we judge that? What's easy for one reader to understand might not be easy for another,

which could lead to students to be surprised by a bad grade when they thought that their paper was easy to follow.

We went in circles like this for a long time and eventually threw out the idea of the class-designed rubric. The student who first proposed we change our approach explained that "Introducing [the rubric] after my paper was almost complete meant many different interpretations could take place in both writing style, organization, and key aspects of the paper, [which] made me feel lost and incorrect in the way my paper was written." She wanted to change our strategy to avoid these kinds of feelings. I did, too; anyone who read her paper would tell you that it was great — definitely not incorrect. She helped me realize that having everyone advocate for a definition of something like organization or style meant that I was actually inviting them to *impose* that definition on everyone else, just like the professors giving students those bad grades had done. We ended up caught between two equally bad options: come up with clear, narrow definitions that would fail to recognize the quality of some essays in the class, or come up with criteria that are so broad (such as "the organization of the paper makes sense") that they don't actually guide the writing or grading process.

This class session turned out to exemplify the complex issue at the heart of grading writing: In order to assess something, you have to define it and have a list of criteria you use to execute your judgment, but writing is complex and often defies that easy categorization. If a teacher's definition of good writing is rather particular, or is somehow unclear to you, then high-quality writing that does not match that definition is liable to get a bad score. This issue is the subject of this essay: I am going to focus on the reason why different definitions of writing are perfectly natural, even if they do make grading complicated. With that knowledge, we can approach some solutions — methods for reading expectations critically, as well as some ways that both teachers and students can leverage the judgment of writing in a way to make it more inclusive and helpful for your learning. I don't mean to imply that writing for a grade is the best way to grow as a writer, or that it is good that grades can have such a strong influence on writing (I don't think that it is — but that's a conversation for another time). My goal with this essay is to explain *why* the grading of writing happens a certain way, so that you can decide how, when, or why you choose to meet these expectations.

Defining "Good Writing"

I write every day. I write academic essays, grocery lists, journal entries, text messages to my friends, among many other things. The metric I use to assess "good writing" in each of these situations changes dramatically — a well-written grocery list helps me move through the store efficiently, whereas a well-written journal entry helps me process my thoughts and feelings about the day. (If I'm feeling sad, listing off vegetables is not going to help me feel better.) "Good writing" looks different in every situation, which means that there is no definition of "good writing" that applies to every situation.

Sure, you might say, but when we're talking about writing in school, we're not talking about grocery lists and journal entries. We're talking about academic writing. That's true, but not all academic writing is the same. Academic writing in history is different from English, or biology, or political science. Even within one academic discipline, or even one genre *within* that discipline, there are many different measures of success. Anne Herrington, a writing teacher and researcher, once did a study focusing on how college engineering students and instructors interpreted the same assignment. Her results show us that a genre — in this case, the lab report — can be interpreted in different, equally valid ways. Herrington explains that, for that assignment, "the students perceived their audience as quite knowledgeable of detail, theory, and technical terms while the faculty perceived the audience as less knowledgeable, particularly of details and theory" (345-6). The two groups imagined the assignment's intended audience differently, which led to the students writing in a way that did not match the instructors' expectations. They would leave out information that they assumed that their audience already had, while instructors were reading the papers trying to figure out why the very same information was missing. Because the two sides understood the premise of the assignment in different ways, students were unable to meet their instructors' expectations even though they might have done the assignment perfectly according to their own understanding of it. This means that matching someone's definition of good writing means making sure that you understand the writing situation in similar ways.

"Writing situation" can mean a lot of different things. We don't quite have space in this essay to get into all of the complexities of a writing situation, but there are three ideas here that you might find helpful when thinking about grading specifically. You might recognize two of them (reader preferences and reader/writer relationships) from the rhetorical situation

that may be part of your composition course. The other concept (genre) is also related to the rhetorical situation; a genre is a typical way of responding to a common rhetorical situation.

1. Let's start with genres. If your writing situation is "I need to express gratitude," then you'll write a thank-you note. There are certain conventions that you're supposed to meet in order to signal to your reader that you're participating in the thank-you note genre (starting with "Dear," telling them that you are grateful, explaining why their gift or favor was meaningful to you). If you succeed, your reader will recognize your writing as a thank-you note (because they also know the rules and conventions of the genre), and feel appreciated.

2. A situation could also involve the preferences of a particular reader. If I give my friend in her twenties a handwritten thank-you card for dropping off a book at my house, she might think that it's strangely old-fashioned. I could have sent her a text. But, if I wanted to send a thank-you card to my elderly neighbor, who does not text or email, I would have to write my note by hand and drop it off at her house. This doesn't have much to do with my own writing preferences, but with what my reader needs or wants.

3. Still, thank-you notes do not all look the same because the relationship between giver and receiver will affect what is said — the thank-you note you write for your favorite high school teacher that expresses gratitude for years of mentorship will be different from the thank-you note you write to your uncle for feeding your cat while you were away for the weekend. One is an expression of emotional or intellectual gratitude, the other is an indication that a favor did not go unnoticed. A different tone is probably warranted.

So, genres, relationships, and individual reader preferences all help us come to an understanding of what "good writing" ought to look like in a given circumstance. What does this have to do with grades? Well, in college, you're likely to meet many different writing situations as you go from assignment to assignment and class to class. The writing situations embedded in each of these assignments will be different, but not always obviously so. It's then important to do some detective work in figuring out a) what the situation is and b) what the expectations are for that situation. This is a complex process, but here are some quick strategies you can use to get to know the different writing situations you'll come across in college.

Learning Genres

- When you get feedback on an assignment, don't put it away. Make a feedback log with three parts:

    1. I was trying to do *X*.

    2. My instructor said that this was good/bad for reason *Y*.

    3. Next time I will try *Z*.

  Framing feedback in terms of what you were trying to do will help you be successful when you encounter similar situations in the future — and be sure to catalogue the good things your instructors say, too!

- Think about what you're *not* supposed to do in a given situation. While this might feel restrictive, it will help you figure out which writing strategies actually are available to you. Something like "I'm *not* supposed to write a five-paragraph essay for this ten-page paper" starts you in a place of figuring out a new organizational strategy (Reiff and Bawarshi 329).
- Ask for models. If you're not sure about what a particular genre should look like, ask your instructor for an example. Don't copy the model directly; use it as a way to get an idea for what sort of approach you should be after.

Learning Relationships

- Most academic assignments have some kind of framing — your instructor wants you to occupy a certain role and write to a particular audience. On an assignment sheet you might read "make a case to a general audience," which should signal that you should explain key terms that a layperson might not understand, or spend some time telling them why a particular issue is important. You also might read something like "imagine you work at a company and a supervisor has asked you for a report," which should signal that you should write your report toward that company's needs, rather than about the topic in general. Always write to the audience indicated on the assignment, even if it feels artificial (Hinton 22).
- If there is no stated relationship on an assignment sheet, that does not mean that there isn't one. Feel free to ask your instructor "what

kind of audience are we writing for?" which will often give you a hint about how to approach your writing.
- Think of yourself as contributing to an ongoing conversation about the topic. Even though it's tempting to just think of yourself as a student writing for a grade, if you instead start to think of yourself as answering a question *with* your instructor, rather than *for* your instructor, you can feel more like an insider. This can lead to deeper engagement with the work. (McCarthy 256-7).

Learning Preferences

- Look for clues in assignment sheets and syllabi about what good writing might be, but ask questions about slippery words such as "clear," "well-written," or "academic."
- Early in a course, if you're unsure about expectations, submit a draft of a piece for feedback. Ask specifically about whether what you have written meets the instructor's expectations.
- Check the syllabus to see if there are any grade expectations articulated there, or any particular formatting/structural requirements.

Definitions and Exclusion

Sometimes, it can be a challenge to make sense of the instructor's preferences. Certain things might seem really important to this instructor that, to you, don't seem important at all. Of course, there will be instructors who will be very clear about what they expect, and why. But, for those situations where it's less obvious, let's turn to James Paul Gee, a well-respected linguist, who has a useful way of thinking about this issue.

Gee uses the word *discourse* to refer to a "saying-doing-being-valuing-believing combination" (6), meaning a Discourse is a way of understanding and talking about the world. A Discourse can include members of an academic discipline (like history or chemistry), or players of a particular sport (say, basketball), or musicians in a particular genre (such as country). At the very core of a Discourse is a belief system: maybe the academic discipline values a certain kind of knowledge, or the basketball players have a certain ethic of how to play the game. This means that, as you work your way into specific academic disciplines, you're really learning the beliefs and values of that Discourse. These belief systems are often invisible, but they form the foundation of your belonging.

To someone grading your writing, determining whether or not something is done correctly is then often a question of whether or not it fits in with the expectations and value systems of a Discourse. But, because it's hard to tell whether someone shares a belief system with you just by glancing at the way they talk or write, people sometimes rely on "superficial features" to see who belongs to their Discourse and who doesn't. Superficial features are things that rest on the surface of writing or speaking that somehow reveal the writer as not belonging in the Discourse (Gee 11). For the basketball players, superficial features might involve using certain terminology to describe a play. For the country musicians, it might be having a singing voice with twang. Examples of superficial features in academic writing might involve punctuation, formatting, sentence structure, vocabulary, or even the structure of a piece. Missing these qualities could certainly be perceived as a mistake, but none indicate that the person in question doesn't believe in the *values* of an academic discipline, basketball, or country music. It just looks that way to an insider.

This is what makes it possible to miss the expectations of an assignment without knowing it: you might write something in a way that is perfectly acceptable to the Discourses that are familiar to you, but don't belong to the one that you're becoming part of by taking the class. It might be the case that you understand the values of the Discourses, but your superficial features give you away as a newcomer. It's worth paying attention to this distinction in your own classes: is the grading scale assessing the part of the Discourse that is about beliefs and values, or the part that is about superficial features? If it is focusing on superficial features, which ones?

What To Do with Grading

It might feel like all of this is irrelevant to you as a student. Teachers are the ones who set the grading criteria, and only rarely do they bring students into this process. All of this is true. At the same time, it is important for you to know why the grading of writing is such unstable business. This background will let you ask the right questions that allow you to do well in the face of the many different assessment systems you'll face in college. Plenty of people will say "writing is subjective and there's no one way to grade it," but that's only part of the issue. The real issue is the very specific *way* that writing is subjective — the way that conflicting definitions of good writing can mark someone as an outsider to a community. Going into a college writing situation with this information makes it more possible for you to understand what, exactly, you're being graded on.

It's also possible to use the imperfection of grading to pull different kinds of meaning and validation out of your writing projects. We now know that an instructor's grading scale is only one way to measure a writing project, which means that you can also try to assign your own markers of quality. Maybe you've always organized your paper in one particular way and you decide to try a new strategy. A grade might not recognize the success that you have in trying this new method, but that does not mean it wasn't important or helpful in your development as a writer. Working with the limitations of grading gives you the space to assess your writing on your own terms, a process that can help you improve as a writer over time. After all, you're the only one who is tracking your growth from one class to the next. You also might decide that pursuing the grade is not the most important thing to you — that there are other things that you want to do or say with your writing that your instructor might not be actively looking for.

There's another reason why it's important to recognize that all writing assessment deals with narrow definitions of "good writing." Even though you don't spend your nights and weekends grading stacks of student writing, you assess writing (and speaking) all the time. You can immediately recognize when someone is an outsider to your Discourse — maybe you play a sport and can easily tell when someone is inexperienced, or you can identify someone who isn't from your city because they mispronounce a street name. The immediate reaction, most of the time, is to label this person as an outsider, which makes it difficult for that person to contribute to the group with any credibility (even if they believe in its values). This is just like what happens when you get a bad grade on a project because of some formatting rule that you didn't know about — you labelled yourself as an outsider to the discourse.

In plenty of situations, this kind of judgment around language happens because of differences in language, dialect, and accent — factors that are often (but not always) traceable to race, nationality, and class. For example, I remember a teacher telling my whole sixth-grade class to never say "ax" instead of "ask," because it seems unprofessional. It's important to point out that "ax" is a pronunciation that is grounded in Black American speech (McWhorter) and is not "unprofessional" in and of itself. It is merely *labeled* unprofessional — graded that way — by people who have been told that it doesn't fit. It's another superficial feature.

None of this is to say that the superficial features are necessarily bad. These communal ways of speaking evolved for a reason: they help get across complicated ideas quickly and they help bind a group together. (If

you're playing basketball, it's much easier to shout "box out" than it is to say "you there, please block the opposing player from getting near the basket for a rebound.") The problem arises when superficial features are used as a way of keeping people from participating in a community without good reason — especially when the communities in question, like the academic community, or the community of a given workplace, have a lot to offer to people who are included. When these exclusionary judgments are made on a large scale because of understandings of language assessment that are dependent on these superficial features, they can make racism, xenophobia, and classism worse. To learn more about how this happens, see Alvarez et al. in this volume of *Writing Spaces*. The only way to undo that is to pay closer attention to the way that we judge the way people express themselves, and bring attention to how those judgments are taught to new generations in schools. To do this, it might be helpful to take up some reflective activities around race and language (see Grayson, also this volume).

I propose that we channel frustrations with the limited definitions of good writing that we encounter in school toward developing more generous definitions of good writing and speaking in everyday life. A lot of the time, when I tell people that I think that we should grade the writing of students on whether or not they have exciting ideas that speak to the values of a Discourse, rather than the superficial features, someone usually responds: "Sure, but then when that person applies for a job and they're still making mistakes on superficial features, they'll never get hired." I believe that this is only true because we make it true — because we choose to continue to judge writing in this way. This is where you come in: I think that people who make mistakes on Standard Edited Academic English are only excluded because that's the way most people were told to judge writing and speaking in schools and other professional settings. If, instead, we had a population of people who knew to interpret people's differences in language as interesting and productive, then we could begin to chip away at the way day-to-day language assessment facilitates exclusion from those spaces. Just as we need a critical mass of teachers to see student writing as valuable even if it has not yet mastered (or actively rejects) these superficial features, we need a large group of generous readers and listeners in everyday life. Cristina Sánchez-Martín's article in this volume of *Writing Spaces* shares many more ideas on how we can develop this more generous approach to our language.

When it comes to the academic community, it's also important to think about how writing instructors can grade differently so that we do not replicate these exclusionary systems. The good news is that many teachers

are already doing this. Asao Inoue, for example, has written many articles about his labor-based grading contract, a grading scheme that assesses how much *time* a student spends on a project. The goal of this method is to separate grading from a student's knowledge of a dominant academic discourse that they were not raised speaking, which diminishes the role of racially-driven judgments in his class (61). Maja Wilson takes a different approach, saying that an individual teacher's opinions aren't "a problem to be solved," in grading because all writing is read by people with opinions. For her, this means a focus on narrative feedback, in which teachers focus their energy on what students are trying to do, rather than comparing to an ideal (45). These efforts from teachers, along with work that you can do in accepting and celebrating differences in Discourses, can help make our schools and the rest of our world a more inclusive place.

Conclusion

We went on a bit of a journey. We started with a problem that happened in my class: in trying to bring students into the rubric-designing process, I ended up inviting a flurry of different possible ways to assess one particular assignment, none of which would be fair to every student in my class. We found that this happened because assessing writing means defining good writing, which sometimes is done in narrow, Discourse-specific ways. We then explored some ways that you can take up that conversation yourself and covered more generous ways that writing can be assessed both in schools and everyday life.

How does this affect your day-to-day writing in school? Apart from trying to start conversations about how writing is assessed in your classes, this perspective on the narrowness of standards helps us think about writing in school differently. A lot of the time, it's easy to think that you are writing to a vast standard of "good writing" that remains the same across every class. With the knowledge that writing is assessed differently in every situation, you can approach each assignment as its own entity with its own complex relationship between speaker, audience, genre, and subject. Asking "how is 'good writing' defined according to this assignment?" will help set you up to be more nimble as you move from one situation to the next.

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Teacher Resources for What Are We Being Graded On?

Overview

Writing teachers know that grading is fraught with questions about what writing is in the first place. This essay takes the position that students should be aware of this complexity so that they can redefine the grading of writing as not the application of static standards but instead something that changes from one situation to the next. In the big picture, this understanding of grading helps students understand more about writing itself. The essay also gives students practical tips on how to interpret grading standards, and offers some new ways to think about how their writing is graded.

To do so, this essay relies on an illustrative anecdote from my own teaching where a failure to define clear standards led to an unfair grading situation. It then moves to contextualize that example within the notion of situational writing, and uses James Paul Gee's theory of Discourse to explain how students may be marked as outsiders when writing in college.

Teaching Strategies

Because of its multiple purposes (its practical advice and its broader theoretical basis), this essay can be helpful at various points in the semester. The essay may help in the beginning, when students are just acclimating to college and are unsure of what will be expected of them — this essay might give them a useful framework for interpreting the many assignments that will come their way.

It also might be a helpful essay to give out in conjunction with the first writing assignment of the semester. It can help students read the assignment sheet or rubric closely, and you can invite the class to construct definitions of certain words ("clear," "original," "well-organized") in an attempt to build consensus around the standards for an assignment. One method may be to assign students to investigate particular components of your rubric in small groups, and allowing groups to present to each other about what they think constitutes success in each of these categories, which invites you to enter a productive conversation with your students about your own expectations.

If assigning this essay early in the semester, it might be worth bringing the feedback log to class as an in-class assignment. Students could keep the feedback log privately in a writing notebook, documenting the responses that you or their peers had to the choices that they made. You could also assign the feedback log as small-group work, where students can discuss what they learned from the feedback, or come up with some new strategies for achieving their goals.

This essay also may fit near the end of the semester, when students are working on high-stakes final projects in your class (or in other classes) and may want to know how to navigate expectations. You might ask students to compare different evaluative terms across different assignments in your class or in other classes that they have taken so that they can practice identifying these slippery terms in the future.

This piece may be helpful for a teacher revising their own syllabi or rubrics. Some teachers may rely on the abstract terms that are mentioned in this piece (like organization, or purpose) and doing a deep dive on how those words can get picked up by students could help a teacher clarify how they are using those words in their materials. It also presents an opportunity to consider the role of surface-level features in grading — there isn't a problem with showing students discourse-specific language, but this piece offers a framework for reflecting on the relationship between those features and course grades.

Discussion Questions

1. When reading this essay, could you think of any specific writing assignments from your past where you felt like there was a miscommunication of expectations? What happened? What was the teacher expecting, and what did you offer instead?

2. What should the writer of this essay have done with the problem he posed in the beginning? What would have been a fair way to grade all of these essays while still offering guidance on how to meet expectations?

3. Near the end of the essay, the writer suggests that you can set your own assessment standards for yourself. Think about a paper that you have coming up: what do *you* want to get out of it? How do you think you can use it to improve your writing?

4. How does hearing about the imprecision of grading methods make you feel?

5. How else can students get to know the expectations of a given writing assignment? What strategies have you used in the past?

6. Can you think of a time that your writing or speaking marked you as an outsider to a group, or where you noticed someone did not belong to a group you are part of because of the way they spoke or wrote? What was the marker of difference, and what happened?

16 Beyond Language Difference in Writing: Investigating Complex and Equitable Language Practices

Cristina Sánchez-Martín

Overview

The goal of this essay is to inquire about the role of language difference in the learning of writing, especially in academic settings where normative and exclusionary views of language and writing dominate.* The essay begins with the description of a recipe, a genre that includes explicit examples of language difference to explain how a translingual approach to writing can be inclusive of practices seen as "linguistically different" and create opportunities for equity in the ways we think about writing. Next, it questions why talking about language diversity in the composition classroom continues to be a topic that is still marginal, since it is largely discussed in relation to pop-culture or traditional "non-academic" genres, like the recipe. The essay ends with some questions for writers to look at all the complexities of their practices in relation to ideologies and the conditions of their environments so that they can maximize opportunities for equity.

Introduction: A Recipe for Thinking about Language Difference in Writing

What was the last meal you cooked, or if you don't cook, what was the last meal you ordered at a restaurant? And what does this have to do with

language and writing? In this essay, I begin describing a recipe, a genre that includes explicit examples of language difference to explain how our approach to writing can be inclusive of practices seen as "linguistically diverse" and create opportunities for equity in the ways we think about writing in a US composition context.

Let me turn back to the question I started with. For me, preparing a meal tends to involve using recipes like "Spicy shrimp ceviche" or "Aguachile." This meal is one of my favorites of all time and it consists of "raw" fish that has been marinated in citrus juice and it is put together with veggies like cucumber, onion, tomato, etc. Ceviche is a common dish in Latin America, especially in Perú and México, but you can find recipes to make it in the *Food Network* website and many other blogs and cookbooks for a US audience. The specific recipe I will describe next is published in a book called *Claudia's Cocina*, and it includes textual choices that do not fit in with notions of "Standard Written English" (SWE).

The very same title of the cookbook is an example: *Claudia's Cocina*. If you don't speak Spanish, you might have noticed that the structure of the phrase follows the grammatical "rules" of English for expressing possession (what belongs to who). This tends to be expressed through the apostrophe and the "s", as in "my friend's car" or, as in the cookbook, "Claudia's Cocina." However, the title of the book includes a word in Spanish (cocina = kitchen). This mix of English and Spanish grammatical structures and words is what some researchers call "code-meshing" (which has also been studied in relation to Black English, Chinese, and other named languages and varieties).

Throughout the entire recipe, there are many more examples of what we can call "translingual" practices by which writers move across traditional understandings of separate languages. For example, under the words "spicy shrimp ceviche," there is a Spanish word "aguachile" (literally "water and chile"), providing a bilingual title. In fact, the very same word "ceviche" is already a Spanish word first used in Perú but that might have originated from Quechua (an indigenous language from the Andes region) or/and another Spanish word (escabeche) with Arabic roots. If you do a Google search, you will realize that "ceviche" is already a commonly used word in English, and like the author of the recipe, because of its common use, it is not seen as "foreign." The same happens with words like "taco" (Spanish), "sushi" (Japanese), "pasta carbonara" (Italian) or "croissant" (French).

How many times have you thought about all the words in English that come from other languages? English, like any other language, is inundated by "borrowings" or words taken from other languages. In fact, if you

search the "etymology" (origin) of any word in English, you will realize that it comes from somewhere else. If you are also a language nerd like me, you might be interested in checking up some words at the Online Etymology Dictionary.

Let me continue analyzing the recipe. Without going into too much detail, this recipe works for me since it reflects the kinds of literacies I am used to. Besides all the language practices it portrays (as explained above), the unit measurements are also "bilingual" since they appear in both the metric system (grams and milliliters, for example) and the imperial system (pounds and cups, in this recipe) and it includes a "cultural" note where the author explains what the meal means, how it is cooked in its place of origin, and ways of adapting it to taste. In addition, the way the information is arranged on the page, the use of color, different fonts, and formats makes it easy to read, and so, when I am cooking this meal, the recipe perfectly accomplishes the goal of walking me through the cooking process. The point is: the language practices of composing this recipe work and reflect the actual language and identity of many people in the US and beyond. What do these practices consist of then? Among others, these involve crossing the boundaries of single and separate languages in your writing activities, like having bilingual options, inserting words from other languages, adding notes to clarify cultural content, playing with the grammatical and lexical (vocabulary) structures of "standard forms" (like in "Claudia's Cocina") and playing with textual, visual, spatial forms of meaning-making. In general, these practices allow people to use their previous experiences in ways that are meaningful to them, without restricting their creativity and with a deep understanding of their writing goals and audience.

From Language Myths to Language in Translation

As I mentioned earlier, if every word in English can be traced back to other languages, then every kind of writing can be considered "translingual." Some scholars say that English is a language that is "always in translation" (Pennycook). What this means is that every time that we compose something, we have to "rethink" and "redo" previous language and composing practices, since no writing situation is like others. For example, you might have noticed that if you had to write a paper about a specific topic, present it to the class using a PowerPoint, and create a handout for your classmates, each of those times, you are "retelling" your paper, using different kinds of language, even if the audience is the same and even if you see yourself as a monolingual. As with the recipe, you might have to use technical words

or jargon from a specific field (that depending on the field, might come from other languages), so you might want to add a note to explain those expressions, or you might need visuals to clarify its meaning. Or, if you are a multilingual person, you might use expressions from other languages as you explain your topic and or your work to your audience.

Despite these common examples of translingualism, the writing classroom in the US has always been shaped by two language myths: monolingualism and standard written language. Monolingualism in the writing classroom assumes that the goal is to teach everyone one single version of English. But this is unrealistic because, for starters, it overlooks the fact that most people in the US speak multiple languages or speak multiple varieties of English. Furthermore, it doesn't address the fact that assuming there is one "right" or "best" way to speak English privileges (and idealizes) certain varieties of English. In fact, as literacy educator April Baker-Bell explains, for many decades, the teaching and learning of composition has revolved around the idea of "standard American English" whose ideal speakers have been imagined as white native speakers of American English. So, who falls under that category and who doesn't? If we imagine our classrooms as monolingual spaces with white native speakers of English as the audience, the kinds of texts, approaches to studying them, and assessing them are specifically designed in ways that are marginalizing to other language demographics. I will get back to this later, but first, let me unpack the second language myth directly linked to monolingualism: standard language ideologies.

Rosina Lippi-Green, a sociolinguist, explains that the idea of "standard American English" is an artificial human construct used to establish hierarchies of language users. As a social construct, the concept of "standard American English" doesn't really exist beyond artificial examples used in textbooks and maybe machine recordings (like when you take the elevator and you hear the words "third floor" indicating where you have landed at). For example, even those who consider themselves "monolingual" speakers of English also have a diverse language inventory based on:

1. Dialects, geographical varieties of a language like "southern American English" or "Chicago English" (for instance, you might have heard that people in some areas of the US say "soda" whereas others say "pop" or "coke" based on where they've spent the majority of their lives);

2. Sociolects, which refer to all the social traits—often a combination of them, that inform language practices like "age," "profession,"

"ethnicity," "gender," etc. (For example, you might have noticed that your grandparents are not familiar with some of the expressions and words you use to communicate and that is, in part, due to the age gap);

3. Idiolects, unique language patterns that are distinctive from everyone else's. Richard Nordquist uses a fictional example from the TV show *Parks and Recreation* to illustrate what idiolects are. He refers to what the character played by Aziz Ansari (Tom, in the show) says about his own language: "*Zerts* are what I call desserts. *Tray-trays* are entrees. I call sandwiches *sammies, sandoozles*, or *Adam Sandlers*. Air conditioners are *cool blasterz*, with a *z*. I don't know where that came from." As Tom humorously explains in the show, he has a unique way of using language based on his personality and other factors that he is even not aware of.

As a teacher of writing, I have talked about these two myths (monolingualism and standard language) with my students on many occasions, realizing that a view of language and writing beyond those myths does not just describe the practices of people like me, who are multilingual, but also of those who see themselves as monolingual. When language practices are understood beyond these myths, they are translingual (the language that you use can't be 100% measured as belonging to one single language and one single modality). Most of the time, these conversations happen when we discuss types of writing like recipes, menus, posters, street or protest signs, songwriting, poems, infographics, comics, maps, social media, etc., which tend to offer opportunities for creativity, and thus, "non-normative" language practices.

As part of our discussions, the notions of "appropriateness" or "using proper language" always come up, too. There are situations, especially in academic contexts, where our interest in "appropriateness" may lead us to ignore the reality of language difference. But the truth is that language difference exists even in academic situations—as Pennycook explains, English is "always in translation." What I have learned by talking to students and other colleagues about this, is that visually identifying "language difference" in actual writing seems to be very difficult because monolingualism and standard language ideologies are so stuck in our minds and in the material environments surrounding us (institutions, textbooks, journals, policies, etc.).

What about Other Types of Writing?

So why are examples about language difference often discussed in relation to pop-culture, but not discussed in relation to academic writing? As a researcher of language, I can tell you that language variation definitely exists in academic contexts and high stakes writing, even if we don't talk about it that often.

One of the examples of a prestigious writer using non-standard language in academic contexts comes from Vershawn Ashanti Young, who says

> The narrow, prescriptive lens be messin writers and readers all the way up, cuz we all been taught to respect the dominant way to write, even if we dont, cant, or wont ever write that one way ourselves. That be hegemony. Internalized oppression. Linguistic self-hate. But we should be mo flexible, mo acceptin of language diversity, language expansion, and creative language usage from ourselves and from others both in formal and informal settings. (112)

Along with Young's work, I have known of other examples to support the ideas that writing, even in academic contexts, involves language difference, and that monolingualism and standard language views are myths that, nonetheless, are so pervasive, that we have built an academic world based on them. For example, take the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she describes her Chicana experiences with language difference as follows:

> *Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally, and linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue. (80)

I am sharing these two examples with you, one from Black English and the other one from Chicanx language practices, to illustrate what non-standard and translingual "formal" academic writing texts look like. These examples have been widely quoted and discussed in many other articles and studies, along with many other ones where there is explicit use of "linguistic" choices deemed "diverse" or "different." They also demonstrate that using language difference in academic writing is not the opposite of "appropriateness." There is a place for it, it just needs to be made (the space, I

mean). However, as mentioned earlier, these practices still "feel" marginal and anecdotal—especially in certain environments where dominant ideologies are very pervasive and populations seem more "homogenous." The fact that Gloria Anzaldúa's work from 1987 is still so relevant (34 years later) is very telling. Why is this? I know from experience, that, as I write, I am drawing on my Spanish, I take notes in different languages throughout the day, annotating the sources I use, leaving notes on post-its and recording audio notes in Spanish and English as I think through the ideas I want to write about, I translate, I rephrase, I purposefully code-mesh estratégicamente to make my point across. Do you have similar experiences? What are your writing activities like? Do you record or take notes and then use those initial ideas to compose more elaborate thoughts on paper? Do you change your wording according to feedback received from others? Do you look things up and find out alternative word choices? Do you avoid certain forms of language that you would use in other situations or do you incorporate them strategically? Are your audiences aware of the myths we talked about before? How do they react to them? Thinking through these questions is extremely important because all writers, and in particular, language minorities (those not imagined as white native speakers of monolingual and standard English) do a lot of this work, yet that work is not made visible in the learning of writing. Because those experiences are not talked about and writers are not encouraged to ask those questions, it is common for language minorities to just "accommodate" and disregard the wealthiness that comes with their language practices on the basis of "language appropriateness" in academic contexts.

Looking at Racism and the Conditions of Our Environments

To answer the questions above and to fully embrace the complexities of language difference in writing, we need to dig deeper into why the myths I talked about before (monolingualism and standard language) are still so dominant in our academic communities, where making space for explicit language difference seems to still be rare. The quote below directly presents a call for action, that writers, teachers and students can no longer avoid:

> Telling children that White Mainstream English is needed for survival can no longer be the answer, especially as we are witnessing Black people being mishandled, discriminated against, and

> murdered while using White Mainstream English, and in some cases, before they even open their mouths. (Baker-Bell, 7)

Baker-Bell's quote speaks about how even when racial minorities conform to dominant language views and ideologies, they are still subject to the most extreme forms of racism. Rather than speaking about "standard" American English, Baker-Bell refers to this language ideal as "White mainstream English." She uses this term to emphasize the connection between language ideologies and racism, as a larger form of oppression. The quote above summarizes the relationship between language and racism. Even if some writers choose to accommodate to ideals of standard language, they will still experience racism. So, the question of whether the use of language difference in writing is appropriate or not isn't just a matter of language-knowledge, but a question of systemic racism. Systemic racism is "the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society. These systems give privileges to white people resulting in disadvantages to people of color" ("Being Antiracist"). In fact, as Flores and Rosa say, "appropriateness-approaches" to language reproduce racism, since non-white individuals are asked to conform to standard language but, no matter what they sound like, they will continue to be seen as racially different and they will continue to experience oppression, as Baker-Bell clearly explains in the quote above. Therefore, as writers, we must approach language difference in more complex ways, since arguments about its use are not just linguistic. As a writer, you can consider ways to celebrate and integrate language difference in your writing. For example, when I write different articles, lesson plans, emails, or reports, I make intentional efforts to not limit my language practices on the basis of language myths. However, sometimes I am discouraged from using specific expressions, a direct translation from Spanish, abbreviations, emojis, etc. And when that happens, instead of merely blaming myself for not knowing the "correct" choice, I wonder: how much space for language difference is there in this type of writing? Are the audiences receptive to it? How much have the myths of monolingualism and standard language shaped the audiences' expectations for what is appropriate or not? What would happen if I decide to ignore the audience's preferences?

To answer these questions, it is useful to consider "bigger" issues, rather than just writers' language and writing capacities. If we think about language and writing as just skills and knowledge that we deploy to convey meaning, we will never fully understand the complexities of "language difference." Instead, we must look at the larger situations, ideologies, histories, and conditions that put us, writers, in a position to really be strate-

gically "linguistically diverse" in our writing on our own terms, not on the basis of "appropriateness", "standard" language, and/or "monolingualism." Most importantly, marginalized writers can realize that there is nothing wrong with them. While they have the same potential as any other writer, they have been placed in situations where other writers had language advantages. To acknowledge these issues, writers can reflect on questions related to the following:

1. Language myths (standard and monolingual views), especially those that put some writers at a disadvantage based on notions of "appropriateness," and the history behind those beliefs, like "what ideologies surround this type of writing and how did those ideologies come to be?"

2. The lived and sensorial experiences of language practices, like "are you blaming yourself for your writing and language abilities or is there is something beyond your control at stake? How does a particular writing situation and the expectations attached to it make you feel as you try to use your knowledge?" For example, Gloria Anzaldúa expresses that the lack of recognition of her language is as if her tongue, the actual organ, was cut from her body.

3. The environments where you write and the material conditions in it, like "how do the textbooks, assignments, and readings for this class speak about language? Are they reflective of and welcoming of language difference in ethical ways or do they reinforce social hierarchies and racism"?

Now, let me clarify that, unfortunately, these questions will not automatically produce the "right" environment where all of a sudden and magically, we will all be able to make sense using everything we know, in whatever languages we choose to do so. That won't happen. Undoing the biases and discriminatory ideologies that have shaped all human activity for centuries takes time and intentional collective efforts. But, at least, you will be better equipped to understand why it is that sometimes using jargon, code-meshing, and being creative with language beyond standard and monolingual norms is okay and other times it is not. And perhaps, by identifying how a specific writing requirement or situation makes you feel, you can find your way around it, or by realizing that the conditions under which you write are already putting some writers at a disadvantage, you might start a conversation and negotiate a solution to it.

Recommendations for Thinking about Language in Complex and Equitable Ways

How about your own writing practices, especially those that you do for a class? What can be done to embrace a more equitable approach to language? In what follows I offer some recommendations:

1. Think about writing as an activity not as a process or a product. By this, I mean: think about all that goes into composing something. For example, earlier I said that I speak to friends and colleagues about my writing, I do research, I take notes, record voice messages, draw maps, create outlines, rephrase, look words up, translate, etc. If I think about writing as just me sitting on my computer typing words in English and adapting to expectations, I am missing out on so many more things that I do that involve using my "diverse" language repertoire. Focusing on all the other extra things I do, allows me to see the wealth of experiences, skills, and knowledge I am using, and I can be more strategic about it.

2. Choose types of writing that create space for some language experimentation or creativity. If you think they do not allow for language difference, then ask your professor about it, clarifying your intentions and why using language difference is important to you. Identify strategies to negotiate its use, for example, by adding notes in parenthesis, translating, using images, etc. Find other texts where some of these strategies are used, analyze them, and build your own based on the examples you found.

3. When you are reading other writers' work and you have to peer-review or peer-assess it, consider your own biases as you present your feedback. Think about questions like "why is it that I am asking the writer about that one expression? What does that say about my own language ideologies and understanding of 'appropriateness'? Why would that expression stand out to me and other readers? In what ways is the type of writing itself discouraging the writer from using language difference? What am I learning that I don't know about language from this writer?"

Responding to these questions about the genre I presented at the beginning of this essay seems fairly easy because the situation itself requires more explicit uses of language difference outside of traditional ways of thinking about language and writing. What about other situations where these

conversations are more marginal? Well, responding to the questions above can be part of your toolkit to understand why certain language practices and identities are (or are not) integral to any other kind of writing. They can also help to think about why all those writers who do not match the unreal expectations of standard and monolingual myths are othered when they think about their writing in traditional ways. If you are one of those writers, I hope this essay has contributed to affirming your practices and encourage you to strategically integrate them. Ultimately, our collective efforts will foster equitable approaches to the learning of writing.

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Teacher Resources for Beyond Language Difference in Writing: Investigating Complex and Equitable Language Practices

Conversations about language difference and its relationship to writing are not just shaped by our own interests and practices, but are also determined by the space that is made or not for it in our teaching, programs, resources, etc. As a teacher, these are some activities that have contributed to making "space" in my own contexts for language difference in complex ways, despite surrounding dominant ideologies and requirements. To enable students' self-inquiry processes about their own language practices, students can be asked to respond to the following activities:

1. Think about: what are some of the language myths you know? Have you ever been "corrected" based on your language practices? Have you ever corrected anyone? What do those "corrections" and "language myths" tell you about people's language preferences and the ways society works?

2. Take a "language difference walk" on campus and document (observe and write down) how language practices change depending on the environment you are in (cafeteria, class, students' building, gym, hallway, library, etc.), the modalities used in the genres (visuals, color, size, gestures, spatial arrangement, sound, etc.), the material used (paper, new technologies, chalk, spoken conversations), the people involved and their perceived identities, and any other factor you find relevant to those language practices. What does "language appropriateness" mean in each situation? Who defines it? Why? What counts as a successful language?

3. Document your language practices for a day across various genres (social media genres, email, text, posters, signs, writing for different classes, etc.), in different spaces and when different audiences are involved. What does "language appropriateness" mean in each situation? Who defines it? Why? What counts as successful language in those cases?

4. Share your notes with your peers and listen to theirs. In what ways do the language practices you documented differ from everyone else's or not? What have you learned about language that you didn't know before? How does the creative/ non-normative use of language make you all feel?

17 Read the Room! Navigating Social Contexts and Written Texts

Sarah Seeley, Kelly Xu, and Matthew Chen

Overview

This chapter is a collaboration between a professor (Sarah Seeley) and two former students (Kelly Xu and Matthew Chen).* We begin with a discussion of a key concept: the discourse community. In doing so, we illustrate why it is necessary to examine the social side of communication. This is an invitation for readers to think about the fact that academic communication practices are structured in ways that are actually quite similar to the more familiar communication practices they use on a daily basis. We offer readers a framework for understanding how the social assumptions associated with familiar communicative contexts may be useful in understanding new or unfamiliar contexts.

We use the social media platform TikTok as an extended example as we explore the various criteria that define a discourse community. Xu and Chen then offer examples of how people become competent communicators within the context of new new-to-them scientific discourse communities. They cover topics including learning a "hidden" lexicon, building confidence and independence, and navigating tacit power hierarchies. These experiences reinforce the fact that effective communication requires contextual awareness and that understanding social norms is essential for developing that awareness.

Navigating new communicative contexts can be tricky. This is true of enrolling at a new school, starting a new job, or joining a new friend group. In each case, we need to start by "reading the

room." This means identifying the values and circumstances that shape the new social context so we can communicate confidently and appropriately. But, as we know, what it means to speak or write "appropriately" is not the same in all social contexts. While it may seem like a stretch to compare the task of writing a lab report and that of writing a text message, each context equally requires us to examine what counts as "appropriate." This chapter offers you tools and examples that should help you examine and respond to the social circumstances that characterize unfamiliar contexts in your own life.

To help guide the process of "reading" whatever "room" you may find yourself in, we will begin with a discussion of an important concept: the discourse community. We will use the social media platform TikTok as an example as we explore the various criteria that define a discourse community. We will then move on to offer two narrative-based examples of how college students have navigated the social challenges involved with becoming productive members of new-to-them scientific discourse communities. Kelly Xu will detail her experiences as a biology student interning at a cancer research institution, and Matthew Chen will discuss his experiences of being a mechanical engineering student doing research in an ecology laboratory. We juxtapose these scientific examples with the TikTok example because we want you, the reader, to understand that academic communication practices are structured in ways that are actually quite similar to the more familiar communication practices you use on a daily basis.

The Discourse Community

Being new to "the room" is an inevitable experience. This happens whenever we start a new class or accept a new job. We have to learn the language and expectations required to succeed in the new situation. The discourse community concept will help you examine, understand, and thus succeed in those new situations. The linguist John Swales first developed a list of criteria for defining discourse communities in his book *Genre Analysis* (1990). In a more recent (2017) article, he revised these criteria because he wanted to account for the changing nature of communication in our contemporary world. In the following list, we are paraphrasing an article published in the journal *Composition Forum,* where Swales suggests that discourse communities are defined by the following eight criteria:

1. broadly agreed upon sets of goals
2. ways of communicating within the group

3. member participation that provides information, feedback, and initiates action
4. the use of specific formats (genres) for communicating within the group
5. the use of specific vocabulary (lexis) for communicating within the group
6. a core group of experienced members
7. the sense that certain things can be left unsaid
8. horizons of expectation

In the next section, we will have a closer look at each of these criteria.

How Can These Criteria be Used to Understand TikTok?

At the time of this writing, TikTok is consistently in the news for its role in circulating conspiracy theories and cultivating extremism (Ovide; Clayton). The community is receiving increasing amounts of attention, and, with the mobile app having been downloaded more than 2 billion times, it offers a timely case study: can TikTok "tick" all the boxes in Swales' list (Brown; Leskin)?

First, Swales suggests that a discourse community is defined by a broadly agreed upon set of goals. Can we say this is true of the TikTok community as a whole? Probably not. Like most others of its kind, this platform is made up of distinctive interest communities (more on this in a moment). Such divisions make it hard to say that the community is defined by shared goals. For example, it is difficult to claim that the dancer Charli D'Amelio shares the same goals as the people behind the far-right extremist accounts. It is similarly difficult to claim that #cottagecore creators like @speckledhijabi or users posting to #blacklivesmatter share the same goals as content creators who are cancelled for their use of racist slurs (Jennings). Within this vast social landscape, the only agreed upon goals are very, very broad: producing, circulating, and accessing new and quickly consumable content. As we know, that could mean nearly anything.

What about ways of communicating and participating within the community? Here is where we move onto firmer ground. All social media platforms offer methods for group communication and participation. From rotating trends to "likes" and hashtags, TikTok seems to tick boxes two and three on Swales' list.

How about specific formats and vocabulary? Tick, tick. TikTok is defined by short video content sharing. Creators can loop or otherwise string together shorter clips to circulate "larger" videos that are up to 60 seconds long. In this way, TikTok builds on the short video format, or genre, that was a staple of its predecessor Musical.ly. Of course, this genre has also been popularized by Vine's 6 second videos (R.I.P.), and we can also see short form video content sharing in other places, like 15-second Instagram Reels.

Now, does TikTok have a core group of experienced members? Well, yes and no. We cannot answer this question without circling back to our discussion of the first criterion. Recall, we had trouble saying that the TikTok community, *as a whole,* shares any specific goals. Building on this, we can say that there *are* experienced or core members, but that they are clustered across different "pockets" of the community. These clusters can be mapped across one important divide: Alt TikTok vs. Straight TikTok. Within these very large categories, content is characterized by wildly different goals and values. So, while there are core members within "sub-communities" across, for example, Alt TikTok, individual users also retain the freedom to shape genres and vocabulary in individualistic and grassroots ways (Sung).

Swales's seventh criterion relates to the fact that, within a given community, certain things can be left unsaid. Drawing on the work of the linguist Alton Becker, Swales calls this "silential relations." To understand this concept, we could think about the building abbreviations and program acronyms that are used on our respective campuses. For example, as members of our own campus-based discourse community, we, the writers, know exactly what "COMM+D" means, so we don't need to spell out the Center for Global Communication and Design. We're sure there are similar acronyms and abbreviations that define your campus community. We could also think about "silential relations" in terms of slang. From platform-wide slang like "story time" and "duet" to the slang that characterizes TikTok's niche communities, this box is ticked.

The final criterion relates to something Swales calls a "horizon of expectation." As he puts it, a discourse community "develops horizons of expectation, defined rhythms of activity, a sense of its history, and value systems for what is good and less good work" (Swales, "Concept"). There are a lot of considerations bundled here. Linking back to the idea that TikTok users generally aim to produce, circulate, and access new and quickly consumable content, we can see, once again, that the TikTok community *as a whole* is too large to be meaningfully examined in terms of some of these criteria. Numerous histories, value systems, and associated social ex-

pectations are observable across TikTok at any given moment. For example, at the time of this writing, the TikTok site indicates that videos categorized under #BLM have received a collective 12.3 billion views. On the other hand, TikTok also had to issue an apology in June 2020 over allegations of censoring this very hashtag (Harris). In other words, TikTok is comprised of a myriad of "rooms" that may need to be "read" quite differently.

As a new(ish) member of a university community, you may be interested to know that, like TikTok, the academic community as a whole is also too large to be meaningfully examined as a singular discourse community. What counts as "good" writing or "successful" communication is going to vary widely across the classes you take in different disciplines. This is because disciplinary goals, genres, languages, and expectations all vary. We must always read the room and respond accordingly. Now that we've explored how the discourse community criteria can (and cannot) help us understand TikTok, Kelly Xu and Matthew Chen will apply the same ideas in their stories of learning social norms and gaining authority as new members of scientific discourse communities.

The Lab Experience: Free Trial vs. Full Membership (Kelly)

After interning at a medical oncology lab for two summers, I have experienced being a member, an outsider, and everything in between. In what follows, I will reflect on these experiences using the discourse community framework. As you likely know from your own experiences, the conceptual boundaries of any community are most evident to anyone who is new. Simply not understanding the tacit rules, structure, and lexis of a community can make one feel ostracized as an outsider to the "in group." In the case I'm about to describe, I entered the lab community as an intern who had minor publications and one year of undergraduate education under my belt. I was certainly under-qualified, and I felt daunted before I even stepped foot in the lab.

In lab settings, educational qualifications underlie all power structures. In other settings, positions may be malleable and accommodating based on pertinent experience, but in the lab, power is clearly defined by education and publication status. The Principal Investigator holds the most authority, followed by MD/PhDs and post-doctoral students, then doctoral students, followed by lab technicians, and finally undergraduate interns. We will also see how this same type of hierarchy structures other lab contexts in the next section, but for now, we should keep in mind: no amount

of seniority as an undergraduate can ever allow for a "promotion" to the level of a PI.

Upon receiving my internship offer, I felt like I was infiltrating the company, rather than earning my position. Although I owned a company ID and looked like any other lab member, there were clearly invisible borders that I needed to breach to become an *integrated* member of the community. I was a long way from understanding the means of participating and communicating that were seemingly obvious to core members of the community. For example, even menial tasks like picking up mice revealed the fact that I was still an outsider. My mentor often said that mice perceive their handler's emotions and react correspondingly. While she confidently grabbed the base of their tails with ease and they would immediately stop squirming, my hesitant grip allowed the mice to wriggle out with ease.

Lab-specific lexis, or vocabulary, also proved to have a learning curve. I was fascinated by the secret language of abbreviations and terminology that researchers commanded so fluently. I took fastidious notes on the aliases we used for reagents, the tiny modifications made to procedures, etc. But I found that even self-proclaimed mastery of the genres and lexis of this community were insufficient for me to establish a place in the lab. Though I rehearsed the words I heard my colleagues use so expertly, they felt ill-fitting and improper when I used them in practice, akin to a child wearing an oversized suit. More precisely, I didn't (yet) feel I had the right to use such mature terminology because I still had so little experience. I now realize that the attribute I lacked and yearned for so distinctly was authority. Since gaining authority is a multi-faceted task, I want to discuss two components of this process: autonomy and reputation.

Autonomy

From where I sit now, I see my first summer interning as a "training period" wherein I lacked the agency to plan my own schedule or act without supervision. To put it in Swales' terms, I could not yet participate independently or initiate my own action. While my days were rigidly structured and scheduled by my mentor, I looked upon the independence of my lab peers with admiration. They were so familiar with the intervals of time they needed to complete aspects of their projects that they could come into work at any time and leave at their leisure. Whereas I was paid hourly and expected to work 9-5, their jobs seem so much more integrated into their lifestyles and tailored to their personal work ethic. Perhaps more importantly, they were confident enough in their skills to complete tasks

within a time window they allotted themselves. Circling back to Swales' criteria, it is clear that my peers were self-sufficient enough that they were able to recognize and participate in the rhythms of work that support overarching lab goals. Meanwhile, I was given a generous margin of error in everything I did, from booking lab machines times to pipetting reagents from a mastermix. I had to gain my own footing and learn to function as an individual before I could participate as a member of the community and contribute towards its goals.

For an undergraduate with little formal lab training, there is only so much autonomy you can attain since most procedures must be learned under supervision. However, I would like to argue that I did make some progress towards attaining autonomy. At first, I repeatedly executed the same protocol under strict observation. After verifying that I could successfully replicate one protocol, I was invited to apply the same skills (e.g. pipetting or making a gel) to other protocols without supervision. I repeated this process until I was gradually trusted to learn new protocols entirely on my own. Though I still felt restricted by the structure of the lab hierarchy, I came to appreciate these small landmarks of independence as they reminded me of the progress I was making. The better I understood the goals, actions, and lexis of the community, the more my autonomy increased. Hence, personal growth and increased familiarity are the keys to establishing an autonomous position within any discourse community. Whereas my earliest days in the lab felt like a stressful lab practical, I felt like a valuable partner by the end.

Reputation

I was often scared of asking questions during the first year of my internship. Not only did I lack the confidence to ask a question, but I lacked the basic understanding needed to even form a question. At meetings, I would often stay quiet. This was out of fear that I would ask about something that had already been clearly explained or that I had misinterpreted a figure. Even during my second year, after having completed two rigorous 4000-level biology courses, I still found it challenging to interpret the specifics of my colleagues' experiments. This, of course, was because I was still developing an understanding of my colleagues' goals, and I was still in the process of mastering their genres. During the typical lab day, I felt like a nuisance asking what I thought were overly simplistic questions. In fact, I would ask questions in a "bottom-up" manner. I started with asking my undergraduate peers and then worked my way up the ladder if needed because I didn't want to damage my reputation by annoying the higher-ups.

In doing so, I was actually internalizing and taking action within the social structure of the lab.

This social work eventually started to pay off. Another lab member actually consulted *me* for advice on executing an assay that I commonly performed. I was shocked and honored. This was a recognition of my proficiency and knowledge, and I was elated that, despite my position in the academic hierarchy, my work and reputation preceded me. I had established my colleague's respect, which went a long way toward making me feel like I was establishing my own authority. Afterwards, I proudly listed "PCR" as a lab skill on my resume; I finally felt confident enough in my technique to claim that I specialized in it. I no longer felt like I was a child donning an ill-fitting lab coat, but began to believe in my own credibility. Thus, practice with the genres and lexis of the lab allowed me to gain confidence as a researcher.

Finally, I took the ultimate test of trust and reputation: the dreaded lab meeting. Lab meetings are notoriously difficult because one is required to present their research progress to-date. In addition, rigorous follow-up questions test your knowledge of every detail of your project and (potentially) highlight every oversight. For example, it was insufficient for me to just know the names of the cell lines I was growing. I also needed to know why they were chosen and be able to discuss the levels of expression for multiple genes in each. To put it in Swales' terms, the lab meeting is a demonstration of member participation: you provide information, receive feedback, and action is initiated. Though it was incredibly daunting, I was proud to work with my mentor to create the slides I would present as well as field questions from the audience. By being held to the same scrutiny and high standards as my peers, I really felt like I was no longer just an undergraduate intern but recognized as a true researcher.

One of the most important ways to gain membership within a new discourse community is to cultivate your confidence and a sense of belonging. While this involves rather gradual changes in perception, it is something we can all take control of as individual communicators. Ultimately, though, becoming integrated into a discourse community is a more nuanced process than a simple list of criteria might indicate. Learning vocabulary and techniques is merely the beginning of fitting into a discourse community. This is true in the same way that reading a book can't replace having the actual experience being described. However, the novice communicator can make the integration process less daunting by setting more attainable goals. We can proudly reflect on the landmarks we achieve. In my case, this meant presenting with my mentor during a lab meeting or

pausing to feel gratified after a peer had asked me for advice. Upon concluding my two-year internship, I finally felt like I earned a place in my lab community. I have moved beyond the free trial into the highest level of membership I can afford for now.

From Robots to Frog Guts: An Engineer in Ecologist's Clothes (Matthew)

Going into my second semester of college, I found myself wanting to do something apart from my regimented engineering classes, so I decided to join an ecology lab. My routine of experimenting with circuits and fixing up machines was no more. Instead, I was experimenting with snails and fixing lunch for frogs. Some may ask why I would do this. Through countless hours spent hiking, mountain biking, and camping, the environment has become significant to me. That said, I quickly realized the vast difference between my personal environmental interests and the ecological knowledge these researchers possessed. Similar to the situation described in the previous section, I had some work to do! In order to establish myself within this discourse community, I had to accomplish three main tasks: adapting to their way of communicating, understanding their professional motives, and building their trust. Progressively meeting these goals allowed me to integrate myself into the ecology community in increasingly meaningful ways.

Throughout that first semester, I picked dead invertebrates from a slushy mixture of dirt and sand for eight hours a week. As we saw in the previous section, mundane tasks often serve as a foundation for adjusting to new environments. After weeks spent alone in a windowless lab, churning through one Petri dish of smudge after another, a post-doc invited me to their weekly "journal discussions." I accepted the invitation immediately and found out later that these meetings were a venue for discussing ecology and environmental science papers.

Going into my first journal meeting, I felt that my contributions were going to be pointless. At first, this fear was confirmed. While the graduate students and postdocs shared their thoughts, I was frantically Googling on my laptop in an attempt to understand them. Though I had read the entire paper front to back, I hadn't grasped the context behind it. These ecologists came to these discussions with years of experience conducting, writing up, and publishing experiments. Thinking in terms of Swales' criteria, these years of experience furnished them with a context for understanding

the goals of ecological research, for critiquing such research, for decoding ecology genres, and for using ecology vocabulary. I had had none of that.

However, after attending a few of the discussions, I started to understand more. For example, I realized that no one says "standard artificial media 5-salt culture water." This phrase is ridiculously long and thus shortened to SAM-5S water. Here, we can see the concept of silential relations at play, yet understanding what should be said and what can remain unsaid required more than just learning word definitions. It also required me to understand the ideas within a larger context. For example, through talking with a grad student, I learned the context surrounding the issue of pseudoreplication, which is a situation where one would artificially inflate their sample size by sampling multiple times from a single source. She explained how she would avoid this by setting up 50 individual pools of water with the experimental chemicals and animals. Thus, the experiment would generate true statistical significance, which would make it publishable, thus serving one of the main goals of this discourse community.

In addition, I realized that the journal discussions were always guided by a series of standard questions. Where and when was the paper published? What is the significance of the results? Do they make sense? Are there any discrepancies? Recognizing the format of the discussions and learning more about ecology and scientific genres, I was able to understand the goals of the lab and the context behind their experiments. After attending several journal discussions, I became comfortable speaking my thoughts to the group. I began relating the paper we were discussing to the current research being done in the lab, and making these connections allowed me to get a deeper understanding of the life of an ecologist. Doing this, my comments and questions began sparking a more in-depth discussion, rather than a dead-end conversation. I no longer needed to stress about what to say next or worry about the discussion becoming awkward. Thinking in Swales' terms, this is when I started to internalize one facet of the community's horizon of expectations: the value system that defines meaningful (and not-so-meaningful) commentary and critique.

On another occasion, a postdoc started passionately exclaiming how the figures in a paper were way too confusing and complex. This showed me how undoubtedly passionate they are about their work, and how they meticulously critique the textual artifacts that make up their scientific community. It was also relieving to know how even the most experienced in the lab sometimes found figures difficult to interpret too, with the difference being that they are able to back up their critiques with an onslaught of evidence. With each passing journal discussion, I was increasingly able

to relate to the ecologists' work and get to know them better. This is how I started to break free of that "new person" feeling.

While these journal discussions expanded my knowledge of ecology, I also gained insight into how the scientific research community communicates and circulates information. Put differently, these are the actions encompassed by Swales' second and third criteria. As opposed to engineering, the scientific method for demonstrating results is quite textual. This differs from the more physical nature of engineering, as while I am resizing the fit of a 3D model, the ecologists are meticulously rewriting their manuscripts so as to appease reviewer two. In noting this realization about textual vs. material communication, we can circle back to Swales' first and fourth criteria. Here we see members of engineering and ecology discourse communities using very different research genres, or formats, to achieve very different goals. And, to put it in more day-to-day terms, I learned that emailing busy ecologists is a nuanced task. These messages had to be short and to the point if I wanted to receive a response in the same week!

At the end of the fall semester working in the lab, I'd learned how these ecologists communicate, how they characterize their passions and goals, and how I fit into the community. These successes paved the way for my next opportunity: a summer internship position. Shifting into the new role, I would continue the work of picking dead invertebrates out of wet dirt. Then, after three weeks, a grad student asked me if I wanted to catch snails from a pond. I was so excited to finally work with an organism that was *alive*. A little slow, but alive, nonetheless. I picked each snail out from the pond so gently, like they were the last one on earth, and I brought them back to the lab for the graduate student. Upon examining the snails and realizing they were all alive, she told me "good job." This very brief interaction demonstrated that she regarded snail collection as the most *basic* of tasks, while I perceived it to be more involved and sophisticated. Essentially, I was the ecologists' coffee boy, but instead of delivering coffee, I delivered snails!

Nevertheless, after having success with retrieving snails, I was able to communicate to my co-workers that I am capable of successfully carrying out more complex tasks. After around two weeks of snail work, I advanced to a more complex (and quicker!) organism: frogs. I began transporting live (jumping!) frogs from outdoor experiments into the lab. Given the strong possibility that I might lose a frog, or a data point in the eyes of a PhD student, I worked alongside another person. After a week as a member of the frog-catching duo, I was told I could catch them on my own. I was no

longer the undergrad who picks dead worms from dirt. I had become the undergrad who catches live frogs out of kiddie pools!

In addition, I started to realize subtleties in the way my colleagues worked, and I developed my own daily routines. I was finally gaining some of that autonomy Kelly Xu discusses in the previous section. For example, each morning I would organize the glassware, check-up on the live animals, collect specific animals, and touch base with the director. At the close of each day, I would start washing glassware and check our chemical inventory. Initially, I did not do any of those things; it was only after talking to them over lunch each day that I came to recognize my colleagues' workloads and time constraints. So, when I was given a menial task like washing dishes, I worked it into my routine and continued to do it each day, thus freeing up crucial time for my colleagues. By demonstrating that I shared the ecologists' goals and viewpoints, I was able to gain their trust and integrate myself into their discourse community.

Conclusion

Regardless of the discourse community, gaining membership and authority involves recognizing the social context that surrounds communication. It demands that we read the room. In doing so, we can gain trust through demonstrating our awareness of a community's goals, genres, and language. As we have seen through our explorations of social media and scientific discourse communities, understanding situated social norms is essential for developing that awareness. Effective communication always requires contextual awareness. This is the social side of communication. In order to understand and be understood, one must learn to read the room. We hope that our examples and discussions have illustrated the intellectual and emotional components of being a novice communicator. Further, we hope you now have the tools to embrace this novice status. It is inevitable that we will all wander into a new room from time to time. Once we cross a new threshold, it is up to us to find knowledge and power there.

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Teacher Resources for Read the Room! Navigating Social Contexts and Written Texts

Overview and Teaching Strategies

John Swales's discourse community framework has been widely anthologized. It is, of course, something he has updated over time (*Genre*; "Concept"). It also builds on prior work in linguistic anthropology (Gumperz "Speech"; *Language*), and it is often understood as being adjacent or complementary to other frameworks relating to the social nature of communication (Geertz; Johns). We raise these points because they offer a good context for how one might teach this chapter in a way that makes the discourse community concept plausible for students who are new(ish) members of academic discourse communities. Learning to read the room is only truly helpful if one can also understand a broader lay of the land, so to speak.

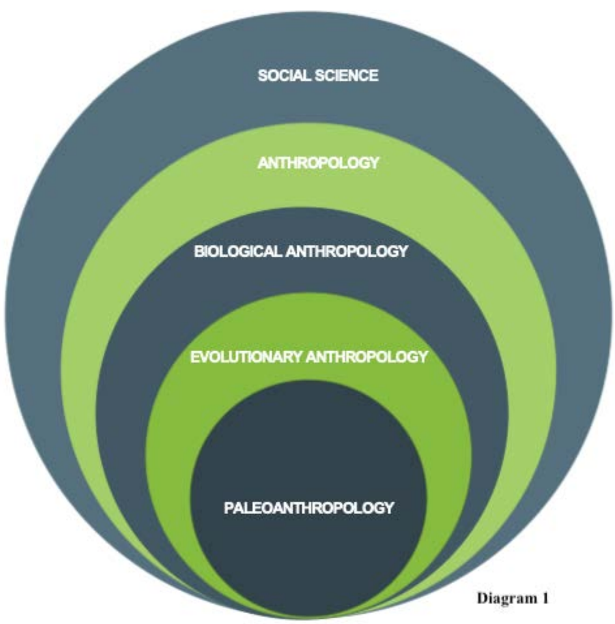


Figure 1. Disciplinary relationships as a series of nesting circles. Image is of five circles nested within one another. The biggest, outermost circle is labeled "Social

Science," the next one, "Anthropology," then "Biological Anthropology," then "Evolutionary Anthropology," and finally, the smallest circle reads, "Paleoanthropology." Image credit: Sarah Seeley.

Scholars (in any discipline) develop ideas that retain varying amounts of power and authority over time. They do this within their discourse communities. Because this is an academic context, it means they do so within disciplines and sub-disciplines, which are "rooms" of differing sizes that students may need to learn how to "read." For example, we could visualize disciplinary relationships as a series of nesting circles. The largest category in figure 1, social science, encompasses many distinct disciplines: anthropology, sociology, political science, etc. The diagram further maps out one *tiny* corner of the anthropological knowledge-making terrain. What's more, we could have just as easily selected the biological sciences or the humanities and displayed a similarly small slice of disciplinary relationships within, for example, ecology or media studies.

Our overarching point is this: the smallest subset of academic inquiry pictured within our diagram—paleoanthropology—is a discourse community. It may share features with the larger social science or anthropology discourse communities, but we can still expect that it will have its *own* unique features. Paleoanthropology is, in effect, its own room, and ought to be read as such. Yet, one can still learn to understand it by applying what they know from inhabiting other rooms: adjacent academic disciplines and subdisciplines, or different workplace or media communities. Similarly, the TikTok section of our chapter offers a pop cultural framework for illustrating how far Swales' criteria can (and cannot) stretch as we attempt to read a room. We believe this social media discussion can productively set the stage for parallel in-class discussions about academic knowledge production and the boundaries of academic discourse communities.

Tracing the history of an idea—when it appeared, where, and how it's been used or expanded—is only possible when we can map out these kinds of disciplinary relationships. The powerful ideas tend to be cited, developed, and expanded on by other scholars within *and* across disciplinary discourse communities. The migration of Swales' framework out of linguistics and into writing studies is a good example. In order to truly understand an idea, students must go outside of the content to examine the context of its production. These are very important skills. This is especially true for speakers and writers—like your students—who are in the process of becoming members of new academic discourse communities. As we illustrate in our chapter, this novice status is an inevitable social condition.

This chapter may be assigned during a unit focused on discourse communities, but it also presents ideas and prompts discussion that may be productive for transitioning into a unit on conducting academic research and narrowing research questions. In support of these goals, we offer two class activities. The first is specifically focused on helping students develop their understanding of the discourse community concept. The second is more a method for integrating oneself *into* an academic discourse community—particularly those associated with the humanities and social sciences.

Activities

Discourse Communities and Power Struggles: Examining Cancel Culture

This first activity was created for use during class time, so the podcast (audio and transcript options linked below) should be assigned in advance. At that point, class time could be loosely structured in "think, pair, share" terms.

As we know, there are core members within social media "subcommunities," but individual users also retain the freedom to shape genres and vocabulary in individualistic and grassroots ways. This freedom can be seen across social media outlets, for example: upvoting on Reddit or the general phenomenon of cancel culture.

Today, we will examine cancel culture. The rise of this phenomenon draws attention to an important question on the social media discourse community landscape: How is power distributed? How are people scrambling to redistribute it? What are the implications of our own participation in these power structures?

You listened to (or read) an episode of *The Daily* called "Cancel Culture, Part 1: Where It Came From" (Barbaro). In it, host Michael Barbaro explores what it means to be canceled and how the whole thing began. Take five minutes to recall the episode, review any notes you made, or skim the transcript. Once you're up to speed, we will form groups and engage with the discussion questions outlined below. I'll pop in to hear some of your ideas individually, but you should regard the small group discussion as a platform for contributing to a full class discussion when we come back together toward the end of class.

Discussion Questions

Please begin by reading all the questions that follow. Decide whether you'd like to focus your discussion on Cluster 1 or Cluster 2. Once you

make that choice, you should be thinking in discourse community terms. In other words, how might the discourse community concept help us to wade through this messiness and create situational answers to these questions? For example, what can genre and vocabulary tell us about any of these definitions or applications of cancel culture? Are terms like "liberal" or "young person" narrow enough for analyzing cancel culture? Are all "young people" members of the same discourse communities? Recall Swales' concept of silential relations. How does a sense that certain things can be left unsaid support (or thwart) the politicization or weaponization of cancel culture?

Cluster 1

Barbaro presents speech snippets where both Barack Obama and Donald Trump discuss cancel culture. How can cancel culture be labeled as "bad" in two ways that are so very different? Is "canceling" to be avoided because it's impolite or some kind of cop-out as Obama seems to suggest? Is it to be criticized because the "liberals" are weaponizing it, as Trump suggests? Is it even possible to analyze this phenomenon apolitically?

Cluster 2

All types of people exhibit socially unacceptable behavior, whether they are relatively powerful or relatively powerless. Given this, how can we make a distinction between canceling a celebrity and canceling an "average" citizen? How should personal security and loss of income factor into this distinction? Should we even draw a line here? Where does it seem to be drawn currently? In whose minds? Should it be re-drawn?

The Synthesis Grid

The Synthesis Grid activity, as adapted from Rectenwald and Carl, may be enacted during class or used as a formal assignment. It can be productive to assign students to submit a synthesis grid as a supporting document that accompanies, for example, a discourse community analysis, a genre analysis, or a researched argument.

What Is Synthesis?

Synthesis is an important writing practice. It is an especially important rhetorical strategy for learning to write in academic contexts. When writers

offer a synthesis, they are combining, blending, or weaving related ideas from different sources.

What Is the Value of a Synthesis Grid?

Producing a synthesis grid offers you an opportunity to take notes in a structured way so you deepen your understanding of a particular topic or question. In effect, a synthesis grid is a material artifact of your research process. It is a record of all the reading and thinking you've done as a part of your writing process. Since writing can't proceed without reading and thinking, it can feel particularly satisfying to document all this "behind the scenes" work. Then, you want to apply that "behind the scenes" work in your writing. For example, offering a synthesis within an academic argument is a very common (and effective!) method for establishing credibility.

How Do You Create a Synthesis Grid?

1. You want to begin by settling on a particular topic or concept that will be the subject of your grid. For example, perhaps you want to write about cancel culture. This is a complex and controversial phenomenon with its own history, so starting a synthesis grid may help you to solidify your own ideas on the subject.
2. Once you have your topic, you need to locate three or four pieces of writing that deal with the topic. Keeping with the cancel cultruel example, I might decide to start with a podcast transcript—Barbaro—and an article—Luu—then build my grid from there.
3. Once you have the topic and some reading material, you want to create the "shell" of the grid. This involves making a series of rows that correspond to the number of readings you want to include. This also involves making a series of columns that correspond to the sub-topics you are interest in learning more about. See table 1 for an example.

Table 1. Sample "Shell" for a Synthesis Grid Focused on Cancel Culture

Writers	**Sub-topics ✓**		
	Redistributing Power	Politicization	Topic TBA
Michael Barbaro			
Chi Luu			
Writer TBA			

4. Once you've created the shell, you want to continuously add your notes as you move through readings related to your topic. Keep in mind that you *won't* know all the sub-topics when you begin this activity. You will fill them in as you learn more. For example, perhaps you were interested in the redistribution of power ot start with, theyn you noticed that writers were often discussing the politicization of cancel culture. That's a good indicator that you might want to add a column for politicization. Perhaps you then realize many writers are discussing the history of the phenomenom or how the pandemic has shaped the phenomenon. Perhaps you notice many writers discussing a specific social implication—for example, the negativity or destructiveness that is often attributed to cancel culture. If so, you should similarly follow such cues to add additional columns to your grid.

How Do You Use a Synthesis Grid?

Recall, the value of the grid is two-fold. It allows you to document the "backstage" work of reading and thinking, and it assists you in pulling the ideas you developed into the "foreground." What follows is a sample synthesis that could be derived from this grid (even in though it's still a work in progress). We can see how the ideas presented by Barbaro and Luu might be woven together to set up a line of inquiry in Table 2.

A Sample Synthesis

While cancel culture may appear to be a relatively new phenomenon, people have long been mobilizing against perceived injustice both on and offline. Both Michael Barbaro and Chi Luu have recently discussed this phenomenon and how it relates to internet language and culture at large. Barbaro and Luu each present the perceived positives and negatives surrounding cancel culture. Barbaro's podcast episode was released more than six months after Luu's article was published, and it draws on the words and experiences of politicians, celebrities, and everyday racists as a method for exploring the complexities of this phenomenon. One major question within all of this is how to differentiate between the "cancelation" of a relatively powerful person versus that of a relatively powerless person.

Connecting the Synthesis Grid to the Discourse Community Concept

As we suggest in our chapter, learning to mobilize the discourse community concept is an important method for "reading the room." Learning how, for example, vocabulary or genre is shaped by social expectations sets student-writers up to understand writing as an audience-driven act. And, learning to map the epistemological landscape of a social debate similarly sets student-writers up to understand academic writing in terms of situated social exigencies.

Writers	**Sub-topics→**	
	Redistributing Power	**Politicization**
Barbaro	Barbaro begins by laying out the opposing viewpoints that often characterize cancel culture. On one hand, it is viewed as: "a growing phenomenon of public call-outs that, for some, are a necessary way of demanding accountability from public figures and those in power." On the other hand, some view the phenomenon as a series of "mob attacks in which a specific point of view is imposed on everyone, even those with little power, through rising intolerance and public shaming." Barbaro explores a number of cases. On the celebrity end, Kanye West, Alison Roman, and J.K. Rowling are discussed. On the "average citizen" side of things, the Central Park incident involving Chris Cooper and Amy Cooper is discussed. It's important to make a distinction between "mobbing" a powerful celebrity to make them accountable and doxing or firing an "average" (albeit racist, sexist, homophobic, etc.) citizen. But if there is a line to be drawn, where is it currently drawn? In whose minds? Should it be re-drawn?	Barbaro links audio of President Obama from 2019: "I do get a sense sometimes now, among certain young people — and this is accelerated by social media — there is this sense sometimes [that people think] the way of… making change is to be as judgmental as possible about other people. I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself, because man, you see how woke I was? I called you out." Barbaro later links audio from Donald Trump's speech at Mt. Rushmore on July 4, 2020: "One of their political weapons is cancel culture: Driving people from their jobs, shaming dissenters, and demanding total submission from anyone who disagrees. This is the very definition of totalitarianism. And it is completely alien to our culture and to our values. And it has absolutely no place in the United States of America." How can cancel culture be labeled as "bad" in two ways that are so very different? Is "canceling" to be avoided because it's impolite or some kind of cop-out as Obama seems to suggest? Is it to be criticized because the "liberals" are weaponizing it, as Trump suggests? Is it even possible to analyze this phenomenon apolitically?
Luu	Chi Luu discusses how internet language draws attention to how people are less socially passive (if they ever really were). She writes, "these terms [#MeToo, woke] seek to open up to debate the things that were once blindly accepted and taken for granted." She further notes that some people are very much afraid of how the internet has given voice to "random bunch[es] of people who have banded together in some common cause. When this common cause is being aggrieved against someone's problematic behavior, and results in 'calling out,' silencing or boycotting the problematic behavior, we now call this 'cancelling' someone." As she points out, there is power in these call outs, which "can spontaneously self-assemble a community based on #shared beliefs where there may not have been one before, tapping into a power that members of a group individually may never have had."	Luu mentions how Barack Obama called upon young people to avoid being overly judgmental online. And, as Luu notes, Obama's comments are a, perhaps unsurprising, instance of someone in power reacting negatively to "power being wielded by [those who] are relatively powerless." Luu suggests that, "though we tend to focus on the negative of cancelling, we forget that there may be a good side—not just praise or approval, but the fact that injustices that were once allowed to thrive can now be revealed and acted upon by a group."

Table 2. The Cancel Culture Synthesis Grid in Progress

18 The Importance of Transfer in Your First Year Writing Course

Kara Taczak

Overview

This essay explores the importance of transfer in first year writing.* Transfer is the ability to take writing knowledge and practices from one context and use it to repurpose or reframe it in a new/different writing context. To help students better understand how to effectively transfer, this essay examines three common misconceptions about writing–(1) writing is natural; (2) writing is a one size fits all model; and (3) there is nothing more to learn about writing–and then revises them into "truths" about writing–(1) writing is a process; (2) purpose, genre, and audience inform the writing situation; and (3) there's always something more to learn about writing in order to help explain how to effectively and successfully transfer knowledge and practices from past and current writing experiences forward.

Growing up, a thought that haunted me was fading into the fashion cracks of Steubenville High School. I never wanted to fit in with my fashion choices necessarily, but I never wanted to *not* fit in either, so it was about finding the balance in my outfits. My mama encouraged me to mix my patterns and to wear bold colors. I'd scour the pages of *Vogue* and *Glamour* for the latest trends; I'd try on outfits in front of the mirror for an hour or more attempting to perfect the look of the day. Now, years later, there is still a part of me reaching for the neon green Sketchers to pair with the floral romper; the style I started to hone as a high schooler continues to be a part of my style today. Style tends to be something that you develop the more you learn about fashion, which comes from reading

through magazines, following influencers on social media, practicing different looks for different events and occasions, and so on. In short, style comes about much like any learning does—through practice, experiences, knowledge, and reflection, and an understanding of what to "transfer" forward into each situation.

Similarly, honing your writing practices are much like honing your style; just as you figure out what outfit matches what occasion, you have to figure out what and how to frame each writing situation based on what you know about the situation. So similar to how you assess what to wear based on the occasion—certain occasions call for cozy loungewear and others call for sparkly, glamorous dresses—you assess each writing situation to understand what it's asking of you about how to approach it. For example, if you email your professor with the same tone and attitude as you might your bestie and get an angry response, you will determine that you shouldn't email your professor as you would your bestie.

Style takes time to develop, much like your writing practices take time to develop, and with each new occasion, you understand more about your individual style and you understand more about what can be appropriate, when, and where. Such as, if an occasion calls for a three-piece suit, you assess the situation. You decide what part of your style you can "transfer" in appropriately—a pop of color with a tie, a whimsical pair of socks, or something that shows *your* style while also dressing for the occasion. By "transferring" a part of your style into this specific occasion, you moved it forward. The same is true with writing—you can "transfer" writing practices forward into different writing situations to help you figure out what to do. But what does "transfer" actually mean? And why is it important for you and your writing?

Let's break it down: *transfer* is the ability to take knowledge and practices learned about writing in one context and repurpose or reframe that knowledge and practice to help you in another context. This can happen at the same time—concurrently—or it can happen in the future.

So, for example, you might have transferred writing knowledge and practices you learned in your high school English course (one context) to your college entrance exam (a new, different context). Understanding transfer and its relationship to writing is particularly important in college. Why? For a couple reasons: first, writing is arguably one of the most important practices to engage with and learn more about in college, and second, so much of what we do nowadays is done in the written form. You will write in your future whether it's in another college class, for a co-curricular club, for a job or your future career, or even for social media. In one way

or another, you *will* write. But, like some unique style choices, writing can be misunderstood and misconceptions about it can be formed. And these misconceptions impact your ability to successfully and effectively transfer writing knowledge and practices forward.

The Importance of Transfer in First Year Writing

First year writing tends to be one or two courses that you take during your first or second semester as a first year student in college. The goal of any first year writing course should be to teach for transfer; in other words, to teach you writing concepts, knowledge(s), and practices to carry forward and help you repurpose or reframe other writing contexts (basically, to help you understand other/future writing situations). Doing so helps you to become a more effective writer, able to assess a writing situation and understand what it's asking of you. First year writing, simply put, teaches you *about* writing and attempts to prepare you for in-school and out-of-school writing tasks. Thus, transfer is so important in first year writing because it's attempting to teach you to be a more effective writer for your future (and this future could be the near future, as in another class, or the distant future, as in your career).

When we think of transfer, we hope it's successful or effective at moving writing practices forward. The example I gave in the introduction of using knowledge and practices from your high school English course to write your college entrance essay could be an example of what's called "positive transfer" and since you are reading this essay, chances are you effectively transferred that knowledge and practice from one context to another—in other words, you positively moved knowledge and practices forward. But there can also be two less-positive types of transfer:

1. Negative transfer, when the knowledge or practice used negatively impacts your ability to effectively perform in the new context (Perkins and Salomon). For example, if you've been used to writing the 5-paragraph essay for most of your life, this is your default response to any and all academic writing situations, so when your philosophy professor asks you to write a reflective letter, you write her a 5-paragraph essay without giving it much thought. You receive a C- on the assignment and are crushed and angry. You did what you always have done; how could it be "wrong?" It's "wrong" because the writing you provided doesn't match what the situation asked of you. This is an example of negative transfer.

2. Resistance transfer, when the writer's past experiences with writing encourage a resistance to new learning often resulting in a roadblock (Robertson et al.; Yancey et al.). This roadblock can manifest in many ways from general types of resistances to fear of failure—different types of students harness the roadblock in different ways depending upon what their prior experiences with writing looked like.

You might find yourself in one or both of these categories without even realizing it. So how can you build upon these and move forward? The first step is simple: acknowledge them. When you actively acknowledge something—whether by saying it out loud in a discussion or by writing about it in a reflection—it becomes real in a way that it was not before. You acknowledge the need to learn more. The next steps include developing that learning and first year writing can help you with that.

Our lives revolve around writing: writing for social media, writing for school, writing for a job; in short, writing allows us to communicate with any number of specific audiences. And we know from research that the ability to effectively respond to writing situations determines success in college and beyond. In the next sections, we'll walk through some of the bigger misconceptions about writing and how they encourage negative or resistance transfer. We'll also look at how to flip or revise the misconceptions into "truths" about writing—certainties about writing that help you further develop your ability as a writer so that you may be able to successfully and effectively transfer.

Common Misconceptions about Writing and Their Revised Truths

Much like your style, writing can get a bad rap, and thus, there are some common misconceptions about it. These misconceptions can hinder your ability as a writer to effectively respond to a writing situation, and these misconceptions closely connect to your prior experiences with writing: "prior" experiences are experiences or learning(s) you've had in the past that have helped shape your understanding and awareness on/about a topic. And because misconceptions are so closely connected to your prior experiences with writing, they can lead to negative and/or resistance transfer because both impede your ability to learn.

Below, I outline three common misconceptions (there are, of course, many more misconceptions about writing, but these are the three that

come up the most in my own research on transfer and with my first year students). Then, following each misconception, are what I call "(revised) 'truths,'" or ways to push back on the misconceptions and build upon them, allowing you the opportunity to more readily transfer.

Misconception #1: Writing Is Natural

Before you begin any writing task, what do you think about? What do you actually *do* before you start writing? How do you understand what's being asked of you as the writer?

You may be thinking: "Well, I don't really think about anything" or "Hm. I don't actually do anything except just start writing" and you wouldn't be alone in these assumptions. Many students believe that their writing happens naturally or without a process (or as many students have said: "Unconsciously"). In other words, a lot of students believe that they don't need to think about the writing task before they actually begin writing it. They believe that writing is a natural process. But recent research in composition studies, or the study of writing and the practices of it, argues that writing is *not* natural: "It's useful to remember that writing is not natural because writers tend to judge their writing processes too harshly—comparing them to the ease with which they usually speak" (Dryer 29). Thus, if writing is not natural, then a writer *must* think about their writing before beginning to help them understand what's even being asked of them and then how to effectively respond to the situation. And, as I explain below, we know from years of research that writing is a process. This process is non-linear and complicated. It looks different for everyone and to create an effective piece of writing, and as my mentor once taught me, you have to trust that process. In other words, you have to follow that process all the way through from messy start to complex finish.

(Revised) Truth #1: Writing Is a Process

Since writing is not natural, this means you need to develop a process in which you respond to the various writing situations. The process you develop helps you figure out how to frame or reframe various writing tasks. For example, the process might include doing a quick audience profile (depending upon the audience), asking questions about purpose, googling the conventions of the genre, drafting the genre, and reflecting upon what worked and didn't work. Everybody's writing process looks a little different because we all have different writerly identities (who you are as a writer and how you understand how to *be* a writer); a writerly identity helps make

your writing yours, and it should transcend all writing situations. For example, no matter what genre Stephen King writes in, you always know it's Stephen King because his writerly identity includes using a specific type of tone, phrasing, and other things that are unique to him as a writer.

We know from decades' worth of research that writing is a process, and you have to learn to trust that process. This means that you start to trust yourself as a writer. The process helps you to better understand what's being asked of you and how you might effectively respond to that writing situation. Part of this includes drafting—from brainstorming ideas to generating rough, working drafts to digging into who your audience is and what they expect—and often peer review or having your peers look over and review your writing to help you figure out what to do in revision. Most writers' process(es) includes drafting, some form of peer review, and editing. But really, your process is yours to figure out what works best for you.

So, what does your writing process look like? Take a moment and try two things:

1. Reflect back on a writing situation where you felt most proud of the writing. What did you do to create it? Why did that particular piece of writing make you proud? What do you wish you could have done differently and/or changed?

2. Draw out your writing process. Yes, literally draw it out. What does it look like for you to create a piece of writing that you are proud of? What do you need? What space are you in? Who helps you? Respond to these questions by drawing them out so you can visually see what your writing process looks like.

Figuring out what your process is and what it looks like helps you to become a more effective writer, and over time, the more you begin to trust your process, the more you'll understand who you are as a writer (and develop your writerly identity). Then, it's this process (or processes) that can transfer into other writing contexts, informing them and helping you better understand how to approach them.

Misconception #2: Writing Is One Size Fits All

How do you respond to a text message from your bestie? How do you compose an Instagram post? How do you figure out what kind of caption and hashtags to use for your TikTok video? How do you write a 1000-word essay?

High school teaches you how to write in a specific genre: the 5-paragraph essay (or 5- paragraph theme) because it can be helpful for the type of writing that you do while in high school. However, the 5-paragraph essay cannot be used as a blanket genre or a one size fits all model. Why? Because not all writing situations are one and the same. All writing situations ask something different of you. For example, in the four questions above, each one has a different purpose, a different audience, and a different genre, which means to effectively respond to each one, you need to understand what each purpose is, who your audience is, and what the genre conventions are. This can be difficult because "people act in multiple, interacting systems of activity where writing that seems the 'same' as what one has read or written before is in practice very different—and not only in the formal features, the 'how' of writing" (Russell and Yañez 359). What this means is, because you are being asked to write in multiple situations at the same time, it might appear that you should respond to them all in the same way as you've previously done before, when, really, each writing situation is unique and requires its own individual and specific response.

When you practice one type of writing for so long, it can be difficult to build onto that existing, prior knowledge, since up to that point the one size fits all model has worked so well (whether it worked well to get a good grade, to pass the test, or simply to get you through). And when something has worked well, it can be difficult to build upon because you are unsure of how to revise those practices. To do so requires an understanding that there is more to learn.

(Revised) Truth #2: Purpose, Genre, and Audience Inform the Writing Situation

As the Russell and Yañez quote suggests, one of the biggest problems with Misconception #2 is that it doesn't account for the different specifics that make each writing situation its own. All writing situations ask different things of you, the writer. An easy way to break it down is to ask yourself:

- What is the *purpose* of the writing situation? What is the situation asking you specifically to do?
- What is the *genre*? And what are the specific conventions of that genre (what makes an email different from a rhetorical analysis and different from a text message?)?
- Who is the *audience*? What do you know about the audience?

In short, there are different types of writing situations and each one has a specific *purpose* with a specific *genre* and a specific *audience*. These are considered "key terms" or terms that help you better comprehend how to respond to a writing situation. These terms also start to give you a vocabulary to help you articulate an understanding of writing. Research from writing studies shows that when students don't have a vocabulary to explain their writing practices, they have a difficult time transferring knowledge or practices forward (Jarratt et al.). The vocabulary, or key terms, provide you with a way to talk (and write) about writing.

Building on the two activities above, take a minute to respond to these questions:

1. What are your key terms for writing—terms that help you define what writing is and how you understand it?

2. Define the terms.

3. Where did each term come from? Where did you learn it? What terms do you need to add from this course?

4. Where/how do these terms fit into your writing process drawing from above? Do you need to revise your drawing?

Key terms, such as purpose, audience, and genre, help provide a way for you to better understand the writing situation and to articulate that understanding. Before you begin to write, think through how to define each key term in response to the writing situation, thereby allowing yourself a chance to dig into the expectations of the situation and more effectively respond. These key terms become part of your process; thus, by having a set of key terms, you create a framework that you can transfer forward.

Misconception #3: There's Nothing More to Learn

What classes were you most excited to take your first year in college? What classes were you dreading?

You might be thinking, "Well, I didn't exactly want to take first year writing…" and many others would probably agree with you. Even though first year writing is a class that the majority of students across the country (no matter the institution that they are at) *have* to take, it is also one that many of students do not *want* to take. Why? Because a lot of students believe that there's nothing more to learn with writing—that the knowledge and practices learned during their K-12 education is all they need to be successful and effective writers. Some also believe that every writing class

and every academic writing opportunity only presents them with the exact same type of material over and over again so that they are merely relearning the same thing they learned previously.

These perceptions about writing lead to some pretty deep-rooted emotional responses to first year writing courses, from anger to indifference to bitterness. As a result, out of these three misconceptions about writing, this one is the hardest to work on and move past. Why? Because if you enter into a class believing you don't have anything to learn or you'll only be learning the same thing you already know, you've already set yourself up to not learn anything. Belief is a very powerful tool, and the ways in which it's ingrained in prior experiences with writing affect the way a writer responds to a writing task. For example, and as many writing scholars have argued, if a writer approaches a writing situation as "something they already know how to produce" (i.e. a 5-paragraph essay) without giving it much attention or thought, then their prior experiences have impacted their ability to truly look at and assess what the writing situation is asking of them and then they simply respond with a 5-paragraph essay.

Pushing past and building onto these prior experiences can be incredibly difficult, especially if the belief is also connected to value (i.e. grades). I've seen students respond to a new writing situation like, "Eh, whaddaya know? I've gotten As up to this! My writing works." Writing then is connected to a grade instead of being connected to the actual situation. The thinking is more "how do I receive a 'good' grade" as opposed to "how to do I effectively respond to what's being asked of me?" This may work for a moment or even longer in college, but what happens when you graduate? What happens when you no longer receive a letter grade for your writing? These prior experiences and learning(s)—especially the ones rooted in beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions—negatively affect your ability to transfer (Driscoll and Wells). So, it's important to try and challenge them and to build upon them, but doing so requires feeling a little uncomfortable, which means you have to open yourself up to learning more about writing.

(Revised) Truth #3: There's Always Something More to Learn About Writing

There's always more to learn about writing but many students assume that once writing is "learned," it's learned for always and forever. But as a writing scholar explains, "Writers never cease learning to write, never completely perfect their writing ability, as long as they encounter new or unfamiliar life experiences that require or inspire writing" (Rose 61). This

suggests you are going to continue to evolve as a writer (the more you learn) and that life will continue to bring about new writing experiences.

A good example of this is in your first year writing course. You are going to be presented with new and different terms, concepts, and practices about writing and, in order to understand them more fully, you will be asked to write about them. Writing about writing (which is very meta and requires reflection) encourages you to mindfully engage with your learning because it puts the learning back on you, the writer, to figure out what it all means. This, of course, is not easy, and it requires you (a) to trust the process (see above) and (b) to have the right attitude, that, yes, there is more to learn about writing. Dispositions, just like beliefs, are incredibly powerful and having a positive engaging attitude sets yourself up to not only learn more but to also successfully transfer what you learn in your first year writing course to other writing contexts and experiences (Driscoll and Wells).

To become a more competent, effective writer requires a commitment to learning more and a commitment to writing more. Writing is not going away; just because you pass through a first year writing course (or set of courses), writing doesn't magically cease to exist. In fact, writing will span your lifetime in various ways and through a variety of modes, mediums, and genres; allowing yourself to learn more about it helps you to become a better, more effective writer and teaches you how to transfer knowledge and practices forward to help repurpose and reframe different writing situations and contexts. In short, by learning more about writing, you set yourself up for success in the future both in college and beyond.

Don't Fade into the [Transfer] Cracks: A Conclusion

I never faded into the fashion cracks of Steubenville High School, and I definitely don't fade into any fashion cracks today—you wanna know why? Because I know that style evolves and continues to take time to develop, and I know there's more for me to learn about fashion by watching influencers, browsing magazines, and taking risks at various occasions. That's my process for honing my style; it's evolved a bit as I've grown older (as it should), but it's still my process. It helps me to understand each occasion and to know what from my style to transfer into that occasion.

The same is true about you and writing: you don't want to fade into the transfer cracks. What does that mean? For example, believing there's nothing left to learn with writing—there is always more to learn about yourself as a writer and about writing more generally. Like I continue to evolve with my style, you will continue to evolve as a writer the more you

learn and the more you write. You will also learn how to hone your writing process(es), which in turn will help you be able to figure out what's being asked of you in the writing situation and more effectively transfer writing knowledge and practices. Acknowledging and building on the common misconceptions about writing allows you to bridge your prior with your current experiences and learning(s) so that transfer is possible.

First year writing is an important part of your college career—it offers you valuable writing knowledge and practices that can transfer forward into other college classes and beyond.

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Teaching Resources for The Importance of Transfer in your First Year Writing Course

Overview and Teaching Strategies

The goal of this essay is to introduce students to the transfer of writing knowledge and practices by offering some very common misconceptions about writing, ways to possibly overcome them, and revised "truths" about writing. As transfer research shows, one of the most important things we teachers can do for students in a first year writing course is to introduce the concept of transfer early on and to keep circling back so that students are aware that what they are learning is important for their future (whether that's a current future, such as another class where they have a writing assignment, or the far off future, such as for a job). It's also important to call it "transfer" so that students understand that what they are learning does and can move forward with them. Terminology gives them a way to verbalize their understanding. The assignments shared are examples of ways to reiteratively build upon students' prior experiences, knowledge(s), dispositions, attitudes, etc. Because many students enter our classrooms with a "prior" understanding that conflicts with what they are currently learning, it's important to keep returning to questions and having students reflect on those questions so that they begin to develop an awareness that there *is* more to learn about writing. This in turn helps them to understand more about what writing is and how they might go about framing a writing situation.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to "transfer" writing knowledge and/or practices forward?
2. What are some common misconceptions about writing?
3. How might a writer overcome some of these misconceptions?
4. Why is transfer important in a first year writing course?
5. What was/is your biggest misconception about writing? How has it helped/hindered your ability to learn more about writing?

6. Building on what the article suggests, what would be a revised truth about writing that you've learned in college?

Activities

The assignments below are meant to be scaffolded so that they build upon one another.

Reflection Activity (Completed during Week 1 of the Semester/Quarter):

In this introductory reflection to the course, to each other, and to your professor, please explore what's called "the prior": your previous relationship with writing, your understanding about writing, how you identify as a writer, and any previous attitudes and/or dispositions that you may have towards writing. Discuss in detail what writing is to you, what makes writing successful for you, and how it functions in your life by pulling from your prior experiences with it.

Some Questions to Help with Your Thinking

- What are some readings that have really helped define what writing is to you?
- What are some key terms by which you understand writing?
- What are some moments that have helped define who you are as a writer?
- What is writing to you in day-to-day activities?
- What type of writer do you see yourself as?

Conceptual Map on Writing (Completed within the First Month of the Semester/Quarter):

In this iteration of your map, you'll be creating an actual map—the literal definition of "map." Some examples: a road map; a world map; a map of a building; a treasure map; etc.

The questions that are guiding your map are also guiding this course:

1. What is (good) writing?

2. How have your prior experiences impacted your understanding of good writing?

3. What set of key terms do you think about before writing?

As you can see, you've already thought about most of these questions in some way or another with some of our readings and activities. To create this iteration of your map, begin by pulling out your key terms for writing. They will serve as your "getting-from-one-point-to-another-point" (i.e. the type of map you are creating serves the purpose of getting someone or something to a particular point). Right now, it doesn't matter what terms you use, so long as they stem from terms that *you* think about before you begin to write and/or that guide your writing practices; they'll serve as your starting point for the course and for your mapping projects.

Plot the Key Terms on a Map

The goal is to show the connections between, among, and around the key terms for you (the *for you* part is important!).

Then please respond to these reflection questions:

1. Defend your map. How does what you created represent a conceptual map of writing, specifically how you understand writing (at this point in the quarter)? Feel free to pull from readings, class discussions, and/or your writing activities to aid your defense.

2. Discuss how your prior experiences with writing are/continue to impact how you understand good writing. Be specific—what prior experiences most influence your set of key terms and why?

3. Come to one conclusion after completing this mapping activity; what that conclusion is can be anything—perhaps you learned that you don't really think enough about writing before you actually write; perhaps you are still influenced heavily by your prior experiences with writing; perhaps you are confused and need more time to think.

Theorizing about Writing (completed a month after the map above):

Key Terms for Writing

Building on your first reflective writing activity and your first map, what are your key terms for writing? How have they changed and/or evolved since the first week of the semester/quarter? How does understanding these key terms expand your writing practices? How do these terms help you to understand what writing is and how it functions within your own life?

Writerly Identity

Who are you as a writer? How would you define your writerly identity? What does that look like to you? How does considering key terms contribute to the development of your writerly identity?

Moments

Please conclude this reflective activity by generating three "moments." These moments can be anything that helped you achieve active learning, an "a-ha!" moment, and/or connections you've made in/outside the classroom. Within these three moments, you are going to describe, explain, explore, and/or create a response to what you are learning in this course that helps you understand writing in a broader context and that helps you understand yourself as a writer and thinker.

The Writerly Identity (completed towards the conclusion of the semester/quarter):

Throughout the past semester/quarter, you have been thinking and theorizing about your understanding of writing and your identity as a writer. For this reflective writing activity, please discuss who you believe you are as a writer. You have to do this in a non-traditional way so that you are not merely responding to questions. Begin by thinking about some characteristics that define who you are as a writer. What are they? Then decide how you want to represent this.

Some Suggestions for What You Could Create to Get Your Point Across

- a job wanted ad or a personal
- an obituary
- a short short (a piece of fiction that is super short)
- a song
- a narrative poem (shorter poems will not count)

The possibilities are very open, but the end result must be representative of who you are as a writer.

Once You Complete This, Please Do a Quick Reflection

Why did you pick the characteristics that you did? What has influenced your writerly identity (include both past experiences and current experiences)? What's been a memorable college writing experience that has impacted your writerly identity and why this experience? Sum up how you view yourself as a writer.

19 Find the Best Tools for the Job: Experimenting with Writing Workflows

Derek Van Ittersum and Tim Lockridge

Overview

This chapter introduces "writing workflows," a concept that helps writers examine how tools shape writing processes.* It suggests that writing does not take place solely in the mind, with the tools merely transcribing that activity. Instead, it describes how any experience of writing is shaped by tools. Writing with a software application that supports you and your way of working, instead of opposing you, can make a big difference. Thus, if you want to enjoy writing more, to learn more from it, or to feel more supported in it, you might benefit from reflecting on your writing workflows and experimenting with a variety of tools (and ways of using those tools). Included in the chapter are several reflection prompts, as well as a larger activity asking you to annotate the chapter itself using different tools and practices and then to reflect on each workflow.

Think back to the last time you held an object that fit perfectly in your hand. A broken-in baseball glove. The contoured handle of a chef's knife. A game controller with smooth curving sides. How do you feel when you're holding one of these? Maybe ready and excited to make a catch, cook a meal, or play a game. Or perhaps just quietly satisfied. As writing teachers, we think this collection of feelings is undervalued when it comes to writing. Although some writers find pleasure in a fancy pen or a special notebook, many people simply reach for the nearest available tools. By tools, we mean the objects you choose to write with: perhaps

a pen and paper, or maybe a laptop and Google Docs or Microsoft Word. With this chapter, we'd like to suggest that the tools you use to write with matter, and your use of those tools can productively change your experience of writing.

To make that case, we want to introduce a new term for thinking about writing—the *writing workflow*. A writing workflow describes the tools and the process used for a writing task. For example, Derek wrote this paragraph on his laptop in an app called Drafts and then pasted the paragraph into a shared Google Doc. Tim printed this paragraph, revised and added sentences using an ink pen (an orange Uni-Ball Signo DX, to be precise), and then typed those revisions in the shared Google Doc. After using a chat app (Slack) to discuss the revisions with Tim, Derek saved the Google Doc as a Word file, edited the formatting, and submitted it to the editors for review. The tools, then, are the laptop, the Drafts app, Google Docs, paper, an orange ink pen, Slack, and Microsoft Word. The process describes how those tools were used to write this paragraph.

However, this business-like description of the process does not fully reflect our experience of writing the introduction. Nearly anything Derek writes starts in the Drafts app, either as a scrap of an idea dictated by voice into an iPhone or typed on a laptop. These notes sync between devices where Derek can easily merge or split them, and he can paste them into a word processor, convert them to a reminder, or decide they're a bad idea and delete them. For Derek, Drafts is that broken-in baseball glove. Tim, meanwhile, often writes on paper because he likes how free form it is: he can rotate it in different directions, he can draw, he can scribble in the margins, and he can give the page a satisfying crumple when he's stuck. But he also uses paper alongside an outline on his computer, which helps him see the bigger picture and rearrange it as his ideas change. For Tim, the outline is like a recipe and paper is a trusty cutting board. A workflow, then, is not just a bare description of the tools and how they are used, but it is also a loose collection of feelings and memories and mind states evoked or supported by those tools.

This chapter won't suggest that you craft the singular, perfect workflow because writing tasks are situational, contextual, and ever changing, and there isn't a single writing process that always yields best results. Likewise, a tool and process that works well for one task may not fit another. Workflows help us see this, and they help us best match a writing task with a set of tools and our preferred ways of working. But workflows also help us imagine the possibilities offered by different tools and new approaches. We hope to show you how thinking about your tools, processes, and pref-

erences can help you better understand your workflows—and make your writing process more enjoyable.

In this chapter, we will explore the concept of the writing workflow in more detail, first by examining writing tools and how they can change what it feels like to write. Next, we'll define writing workflows in more detail and guide you through a few activities to get you thinking about your own tools and workflows.

Writing Tools and Mediation

Writing is a mediated activity. When we say *mediated activity*, we mean that writing is an activity that requires tools, and when people use different tools (or the same tools in different ways) the activity can change dramatically. It is easy to imagine writing as strictly a mental activity: we think hard about our great ideas and arguments, we transcribe those thoughts, and we turn them in to our teacher. But in this chapter we want to suggest the opposite. Writing is primarily an activity mediated by tools, and different tools can change the activity.

Tools and mediation affect how we think about our work. We often recognize different types of writing by the required attributes of the final product. Your philosophy professor might want a ten page, double-spaced document in Times New Roman, and your business professor might ask for a ten minute spoken presentation delivered alongside a PowerPoint file. That doesn't mean, however, that you need to begin your process in a document or in slides. Instead, by experimenting with different tools in your writing process, you might find that you're better able to think through complex problems, that you can more easily revise, or that you simply find the act of writing a bit more pleasant.

An example might help. The educational psychologist James Wertsch studies how people learn and has been a key figure in developing this theory of mediated activity. He uses pole vaulting as a way to illustrate how new tools can dramatically change an activity. In a previous era, pole vaulters used bamboo poles to fling themselves over the bar. Later, fiberglass poles—which are much springier than bamboo ones—were introduced to the sport. Because fiberglass poles bend, the pole vaulter can use the pole's springiness to propel themselves over a much higher bar. A champion pole vaulter from the bamboo era flatly refused to use a fiberglass pole, saying that it changed the activity too much, calling it a circus trick.

Just like pole vaulting, writing went through a distinctive shift in the tools used. In the late 1980s and 1990s, most writers transitioned from

some kind of print technology (pen & paper, typewriter) to computers. In his history of word processing, Matthew Kirschenbaum describes how some writers quickly adopted computers for writing and how others were resistant. He quotes the writer Paul Aster, who first composes with a pen and later types his drafts because "Keyboards have always intimidated me. I've never been able to think clearly with my fingers in that position. A pen is a much more primitive instrument. You feel that the words are coming out of your body and then you dig the words into the page." Aster uses a typewriter and says "there is no point talking about computers and word processors" because of the risk of pushing the wrong button and losing a day's work (qtd. in Kirschenbaum 21). Kirschenbaum also describes how Joyce Carol Oates first writes in longhand and then uses a typewriter to finish her drafts, because the typewriter is "a rather alien thing—a thing of formality and impersonality" (qtd. in Kirschenbaum 22).

If you're used to writing on a computer, tablet, or smartphone, you might think these perspectives are the old-timey views of people who don't like digital technology. And in the 1980s and '90s, there were plenty of questions about how computers would change writing, and some writers preferred to stick with pen and paper. But writing with a computer *is* different from writing with a pen and paper or typewriter. At the most superficial level, you can edit the text on a computer screen without needing to retype the whole document. Even this simple change can lead to very different approaches to writing. Some writers might struggle with a word processor because they can easily and endlessly rewrite the first sentence of a document. Other writers may feel more willing to revise their documents because it *is* easy to edit them, which means they can try out activities like freewriting, where you just type without stopping for a set period of time in order to generate ideas or get to a rough first draft.

As Wertsch suggests, neither tools alone nor the person and their skills can fully explain mediated activity: "The pole by itself does not magically propel vaulters over a cross bar; it must be used skillfully by the agent. At the same time, an agent without a pole or with an inappropriate pole is incapable of participating in the event" (Wertsch 27). As writers, we cannot select a magic writing tool that makes the challenging task of writing simple. Yet, we also cannot write well with tools that are inappropriate for the task. Finding appropriate tools means understanding what different writing tools can do.

Computer interface designers often refer to the different functions of a specific tool or technology using the term "affordances." If the tool will do a specific task in a specific environment, we say that the tool "affords" it.

For example, a ballpoint pen affords writing on paper. But it doesn't afford writing on glass well—you'd need to use a marker for that. Additionally, it's hard to write with a pen on paper without a hard surface—the environment matters too. The concept of affordances is useful because it describes things tools can do that exceed what the designers of the tool may have intended. A heavy wooden chair affords sitting, for instance, but it also affords blocking a door, burning, lion taming, and blanket fort building. Similarly, computer software is built with certain features designed for certain actions, but there are typically more affordances available. Therefore, one of the ways to improve your writing is to find tools that afford productive writing practices and learn to use these affordances.

Of course, your friend may tell you about an incredible new writing app that helps them stay focused on their writing, but you might find it frustrating and annoying to use. Different people react differently to tools and their affordances. Many pole vaulters found the new springy fiberglass poles great, but some preferred the way the bamboo poles worked, even if they couldn't go as high. Something about the experience of springing over the bar wasn't as appealing. Some writers find the fluidity of writing with a word processor on a computer freeing, while others find it paralyzing because they find themselves deleting or fixing each sentence as they write it and not making any forward progress.

Some critics might dismiss these different responses to tools as trivial differences in taste. Regardless of what tools people want to use, a critic might say, the larger activity is the same—people are still flinging themselves over a high bar or producing written documents. However, we find that this perspective ignores an important aspect of activity: our affective experience. Affect, the designer Don Norman says, is "the queasy, uneasy feeling you might experience, without knowing why" (11). Affect is sometimes described as the feeling you have before you identify it as a specific emotion (like happy, sad, angry). We would argue that people who don't want to use springy fiberglass poles for vaulting do not enjoy the affective experience of springing. We also believe that affective responses to activities and tools matter. If someone is able to produce a written document using a set of tools and practices, but they have a sharply negative affective experience, then that affective reaction has either reduced the quality of that document or will do so eventually, as the writer finds the activity more and more unpleasant over time. If you find that writing with the tools everyone else uses or in the ways your previous teachers demanded has led to some negative affect, you may have resigned yourself to the idea that maybe you just don't like writing. We hope that this chapter changes your

mind and encourages you to experiment with other tools and practices that may lead to other affective reactions.

Short Activity: Describing Your Writing Tools

Think of something you've recently written: a class assignment, a short story, a journal entry, or maybe a simple note to self. List and describe the tools you used when writing. Did you write in a Google Document? If so, what type of device did you write on? What did you name the file? How did you organize it? Was it a one-off note or do you hope to find it again? Or maybe you wrote on a piece of paper. If so, what kind of paper? Was it loose leaf, in a binder, or in a notebook? Did you use a pencil or pen?

Next, think about this process. Why did you select these tools? For how long have you used them? When did you start using them? Are you using these tools in the "official" way or are you using them for tasks the designers may not have imagined? What is your affective response to them?

In a small group, share your answers with your classmates. Listen to how others describe their workflows, and consider how those workflows complement and contrast with your own.

Writing Workflows

Now, when we say we want you to focus on the tools of writing, we don't mean that you should do this every time you sit down to write. After all, as the writing researcher Christina Haas remarked: "Writing would be inefficient and almost prohibitively difficult if writers had to constantly and consciously attend to their writing tools. Imagine using a pencil in which the lead broke every fourth or fifth word, or imagine learning a new word processing program each time you sat down to create a document" (xi). So if we don't want you to learn a new word processing program before every writing session, what are we saying?

It's likely that when you write, you follow a series of similar steps using the same tools. For example, one of us, Derek, starts writing projects by recording ideas in a mind mapping/outlining application on the Mac. This application, called Tinderbox, displays each idea as a separate card that can be moved around on a wide space, allowing him to group ideas together loosely and rearrange them easily. Eventually, these loose groupings become more solid and can be rendered as an outline in Tinderbox, and then printed or opened directly in a word processor. Derek doesn't always go through this process the same way for every project, but this generally

describes how he starts writing. Tim, on the other hand, likes to begin in flexible outliner tools like Workflowy and Dynalist that let him quickly write down thoughts, phrases, and sentence fragments in unordered lists. Tim will freewrite ideas until he sees a pattern take shape, and he will then organize the list items into groups and sequences. Once he's comfortable with an initial structure, Tim will start writing on legal pads with a pen, returning to the outliner software as he revises and moves toward a first draft. We call these kinds of repeated writing processes "writing workflows." A writing workflow defines the steps and tools a writer uses to move through a writing task or project.

A "workflow" is a common term in business contexts, often referring to a standard process the business follows for accomplishing tasks. Our use of the term refers to a process that is more fluid, because we want to highlight how each writing situation might require or benefit from slight or major adjustments to one's typical writing workflow. For example, consider a student who has always written papers in a word processor from beginning to end—starting with the introduction and finishing with the conclusion, often in one sitting. Imagine this student is now in a senior capstone course and required to write a 50-page report that spans many drafts and assignments. This is not the type of document that can be written in one sitting, and it would be challenging to write it from start to finish—the writer might find it easier to start in the middle and do the introduction later, when they are more sure about the scope of the report. While many writers recognize that new situations like this require new ways of working, they often try to shoehorn their old tools and practices to fit these new ways. While this hypothetical writer might realize it is easiest to start writing in the middle, they may continue to use the same word processor and just work with a single file as they are used to doing. But this writer might feel overwhelmed when what seemed like the middle of the paper becomes the second of five sections, or when that section later turns into a series of footnotes. Other tools or practices could help this writer deal with complex revisions in new and different ways.

Recognizing the limits of one's workflow for varying situations is a key part of maturing as a writer. Both of us write daily, but our writing tasks differ from day to day and month to month, and we have developed several different workflows that accommodate these variations.

Changing Your Writing Workflow

So how can you know whether a writing situation requires any adjustments to your writing workflow? Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules here. Over time, you can develop an instinct for distinguishing between when it will pay off to learn new techniques or tools and when it's best to continue with what has worked in the past. However, the only way you can learn this is to become sensitive to the demands that each new writing situation is making. Even if you decide in any specific instance to keep your writing workflow the same, this should be a deliberate decision instead of a default assumption.

One way to increase your sensitivity and develop this instinct is to deliberately look for aspects of your workflow that are frustrating. In our research on professional writers who attend carefully to their tools and workflows, we found that these writers often talked about encountering "friction" in their workflows. For them, friction referred to any set of tools or processes that seemed to take more effort or time than warranted. These were writers with significant expertise with computer technologies and were able to write computer scripts (essentially mini computer programs) that would automate certain repeated processes they did over and over as part of their work. Any time they noticed that they were doing the same set of steps more than a few times (say, writing an email to a customer who had experienced difficulties downloading a digital book), they would create a script that would automatically complete that process (the script would use a template to draft the email and create a few free download codes for the customer, all with the writer just pressing one button).

But friction—and its remedies—can extend beyond tools, and you don't need computer expertise to find or resolve it. For example, Alex Borowitz, one of Tim's former students, produced a short, stylistic video about writing in which a frustrated writer finds focus and inspiration in a campus garden (Borowitz). Many writers have shared a similar experience and have found commonplace solutions to environmental friction: taking a walk or folding laundry or making a cup of coffee. If you know how to search for friction, you can sometimes find that what initially seems like procrastination is actually a habitual response to the friction in your writing workflow. And smoothing out that friction might require you to recognize that your desk or room just isn't conducive to writing, or that you don't have a good system for working with a longer writing project that will go through multiple versions.

Short Activity: Finding Friction

First, divide a piece of paper or a digital document into three columns. Label the left column "Friction," the middle column "Source," and the right column "Change."

Next, think about a recent writing task you completed (you can use the same one from the previous activity). Where in that writing task did you experience friction? Which parts were the most annoying? Which took longer—or more effort—than they should? Which tasks caused you to stop working? List these in the "Friction" column.

For each item in the friction column, identify the source of that friction and list it in the middle column. Maybe it was difficult to find a file or website. Maybe the white background of the writing app was too bright. Maybe the library website wasn't working. Or maybe it was hard to keep your research notes in view as you were summarizing them in your paper.

Once you've identified a moment of friction and its source, imagine ways of replacing it and list them in the "Changes" column. You might change the default settings of the app you're using (to make the background darker, for instance). You might try a different app altogether, or you might switch to pen and paper. As you make these notes, pay attention to your affective responses. Are you interested in this change? Does it make you feel more relaxed? Could it help you work in a different environment or at a different time?

Finally, share your three-column document with a small group. What do you notice about the friction that others have identified? Do you share similar sources of friction? Do any of their changes align with yours?

Long Activity: Finding an Annotation Workflow

One way to better understand how your writing tools shape your workflows is to try different tools on a low stakes task. This activity asks you to use several approaches to annotation and then consider how the tools shaped your work (and how, in turn, your work might shape future uses of that tool).

You have likely had a teacher tell you the importance of annotating or notetaking while reading. Maybe they encouraged you to underline key terms, highlight important sentences, or make notes in the margins of the text. But how do you do that? And what happens when you choose to annotate or take notes with one tool over another?

If you're working with a print copy of an assigned reading, you might choose to underline passages in pen, perhaps with a color that's different

from the text in the article, to help you better see your underlines. If you're working with a library book, you might use Post-It notes rather than write directly on the page. And if you're working with a digital copy of the text, you might use a software solution (like the annotation tools in a PDF app) or find the nearest campus printer.

But how do you make these choices, and why? Is convenience your primary concern? (The closest campus printer is in the library, and that's a ten minute walk…) Or does focus matter more? (You find it easier to read and concentrate on the screen rather than printed pages.) Are there other factors that inform your choices?

This activity asks you to consider those choices and to examine what happens when you work with a different set of tools.

Step 1: Annotate According to Your Teacher's Instruction

Re-read the first section of this chapter and annotate it as suggested by your instructor. Depending on you and your classmates dis/abilities, they might suggest using a print-out and highlighter, a digital annotation feature in Adobe Acrobat, or some other method that is accessible to all students. Either before you start reading, or while you're reading, decide on a few types of markings or notes that will help you better remember *why* you've annotated something. For example, you could draw a star in the margin next to important paragraphs if you're taking physical notes You could use a specific kind of highlighter in a digital app. You could write or type a question mark next to something you don't understand. Keep a legend somewhere to help you remember the meaning of each type of marking or note.

Step 2: Annotate in a Separate Document

Re-read the second section of this chapter and continue to annotate using your teacher's instructed method, but do so in a separate document (either physical or digital). Try to mark the same types of information that you did in Step 1 (for example, main points, interesting statements, points of confusion, keywords, etc.), but do so without writing directly in the chapter document. Try to develop a similar system—how can you annotate, take notes, and return to the sentence or paragraph you're annotating?

Step 3: Now Try Your Own Method

Now explore a completely new method, different from the one your instructor showed you. Depending on your own learning style and prefer-

ence, you might use a different digital annotation tool, or a method for doing annotations on a printed page. Develop or expand your previous system for annotating, including ways of marking different types of passages.

Questions/Discussion

In a small group, share your process for the above steps and discuss the following questions.

- Which of the three steps worked best for you? Which seemed easiest? Which best matched your preferred style of working? Why?
- How might you use your annotations to write a short paper? Which annotation method would be easiest to refer to? Why? What if you were writing a much longer paper?
- Could you teach someone your process? How would you do so?
- After seeing the annotation strategies used by your classmates, how might you change your process? What changes would you adopt? How might they help?

Conclusion

Research about reading has shown us that highlighting and annotating while you read—what we call an "active reading" strategy—can improve your focus. But it's also possible to use active reading strategies mindlessly. You could, for example, highlight the first sentence of every paragraph because a teacher once required it. Doing so without a purpose or strategy might help you see where paragraphs begin and end but tell you little about the ideas contained within them.

Writers can make the same mistakes with their workflows. They might adopt a new notebook or popular piece of software because they read a glowing review of it or because they saw a friend successfully use it. That initial inspiration is important, and it can help us find new ways of working. But much like highlighting without a purpose, it's easy to adopt a tool—or even an entire workflow—without asking why it's beneficial to do so. If a teacher requires us to turn in a paper in Microsoft Word format, we might default to using that tool for the entire project. And when we mindlessly adopt tools and practices, we are missing important questions about how we work, how we might improve, or how we can make a process more enjoyable. To extend James Wertsch's metaphor, when we don't examine mediation and practice we are grabbing whatever tool is convenient,

heading to the track and field competition, and hoping we break the pole vaulting record.

But the inverse is also possible. Some writers find a process and tool that works well enough and stick with it for years. And perhaps this is the best possible configuration of tools and activity for them. But if they don't occasionally ask questions of their tools and examine what else might be possible, they might miss new ways of working or new affective possibilities.

A writing workflow, on the other hand, offers an alternative practice. It gives you a way to ask questions about your work, such as *Why am I highlighting? Why am I using this method of highlighting? Why am I highlighting particular passages instead of others? And how will this highlighting practice help me later?* By looking at your workflow, you can examine how you're approaching the work of writing and ask how your tools are shaping that approach.

To do so, start by thinking about mediation, affect, and friction. Ask:

- What tools am I using? Why am I using them? How do they encourage specific types of working or working in specific spaces? What might I gain by adding a new tool to my process or replacing another?
- What parts of my process are bothersome? When do I enjoy writing the least? When do I feel friction? When am I most likely to step away from my writing? How might this be related to my tools or my process?
- What parts of my process are most enjoyable? What tools do I like to use the most? Do I find myself tinkering? If so, when and why?

Rather than describing some idealized workflow or "best practices" for tools or apps, we conclude this chapter by asking you to look at your writing activity in a new light. If your goals have been related to efficiency (such as getting the paper done as quickly as possible), consider that these goals may be covering over some negative affect—there's something you don't like about the process of writing, so you want to finish it as quickly as possible. Perhaps your experience has been like the champion pole vaulter: the tools you're using spring you up high over the bar, but you just don't like it. It might be that you would enjoy more the way a less flexible pole works, even if it doesn't take you as high (or let you finish as quickly). And if you enjoy it more—or learn more from it, or develop new interests as a result—maybe taking more time isn't such a problem! By better understanding affect, friction, and mediation, you can develop workflows that will help you see your writing activity in new and creative ways.

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Teacher Resources for Find the Best Tools for the Job: Experimenting with Writing Workflows

Overview and Teaching Strategies

This chapter is best taught at a time when students can reflect on their writing process and personal approach to mediated activity. The activities ask students to reflect on a recent writing task, and you might assign this chapter early in the semester, after an initial informal writing assignment, or closer to midterm, after students have completed a more substantial assignment. We recommend that it follow an assignment completed outside the classroom, rather than in-class writing, so students can reflect on their tools, preferences, and environments.

If you want to weave questions of mediation more deeply into your course, you can introduce the chapter early in the semester and have students revisit their workflows as they complete additional projects. This might lead to meaningful conversations about how certain tools work well for some tasks and not others, or how students have to change their workflows to match their available resources or energy levels at different points in the semester. Affect and motivation are important concepts for us, and we have tried to highlight them in the chapter. Conversations about tools and tinkering can be fun and useful, but we would encourage students to focus more deeply on affect and motivation—asking questions about how they're working in particular ways, why they choose to do so, and how that relates to their feelings about writing.

We have found success in asking writers to draw visualizations of their workflows (what we call "workflow maps"), and these maps can be a helpful introduction to mediated activity and suitable for an in-class assignment. We put students into groups, distribute sheets of plain printer paper and markers or colored pencils, and then ask students to make a list of every tool or technology they used in a recent project. The students should consider the breadth of their process for a project, first thinking about the tools used to write the first draft, then for revisions, and so on. These might include PDFs, library books, websites, pencils, notetaking apps, word processors, printed pages, post-it notes, napkins, personal computers, lab computers, smartphones—the options are endless. After the students have a list of tools, we ask them to draw visual representations of those tools (messy drawings are the best) and use lines with arrows to show how

tools are connected. So if a student downloaded PDFs from the library website and then copied quotations from those PDFs into a Google Document, they'd draw a representation of the PDFs, draw a representation of the Google Document, and then draw an arrow connecting the two. They should try to visualize all of the tools in the list they brainstormed. Students can then share their drawings, which will likely remind them of similar things they did and forgot—or introduce them to new things they might like to try. If you're interested in this process, we discuss it in greater depth in our open-access scholarly book, *Writing Workflows*

We have also found it helpful to have students annotate these maps. You might ask them to annotate for "affect" by placing a smiling face next to tools they enjoy using or a frowning face by tools that aren't enjoyable to use. Students can then talk in small groups about what's enjoyable, what's not, and how they might adjust their workflows accordingly. If you assign this mapping project earlier in the semester, you can ask students to return to it as they complete additional writing assignments. Students can then consider how their workflow changes based on an awareness of mediated activity and affect, or the demands of different writing assignments, or the challenges they face across the semester. This process of reading for mediated activity and preferences, mapping it, and analyzing it can help students better see how their tools and environments shape their writing.

Discussion Questions

1. Many writers have to work in contexts where their schools or employers require them to use certain tools. How might these writers avoid the feeling of friction, even when they are required to work with specific tools?

2. This chapter asks you to experiment with an annotation workflow. Are there other reading- or writing-related activities that might benefit from similar experimentation?

3. When was the last time you read the instructions for a new device, tool, or process? Was it a last resort after you had already tried to do it on your own? Or did you read them beforehand? When does it feel "worth it" to read the instructions for a tool?

4. In a writing application you use, pick a feature that you've not used or one that confuses you. Read the instructions or find a tutorial on the web that explains it or shows how it can be useful. Try the feature out and imagine a future scenario where you would use it.

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writing spaces

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